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„The Ambivalence of Heroism in Modern Fantasy
Literature: Bilbo Baggins’ Representation as Anti-Heroic
Hobbit and Un-Hobbitlike Hero in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The
Hobbit*“

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Introduction

Arguably, every fictional book ever written contains some traces of fantasy. They may neither be dominant, nor may the author include them deliberately. Yet, the concept of a possible alternate reality in which the events narrated are true forms the core of most, if not all, fictional stories and hints at an almost natural interrelation between fantasy and literature. In light of this, it seems absurd that the literary genre solely devoted to fantasy is frequently disregarded as less valuable than others. Realism in literature often seems more preferable, and deviation from this literary ideal is frequently met with scepticism. Alexander points out that “advanced opinion” usually only regards “realist novels as serious and ‘adult’”, while fantastic works are often believed to be solely intended for a, ostensibly less significant, children readership (354). Considering this elitist view on fantasy literature, it is almost ironic to note that some of the earliest pieces of literature are considered part of this genre. These ancient fantastic texts usually involve a heroic protagonist fighting for the good and against evil forces. Although the subjects and topics presented in fantasy literature may have changed over the centuries, the notion of heroism is still one of the main concepts introduced within texts of the fantastic. However, this notion of heroism in modern fantasy literature is essentially ambivalent as it unites various contradicting elements from different concepts of heroism.

The aim of this thesis is to show how this ambivalence of the concept of heroism as depicted in fantasy literature affects the portrayal of a modern fantasy hero. I argue that this ambivalence is crucial to the development of one of the genre’s most known protagonists, namely the hobbit Bilbo Baggins. Hence, I will apply my argumentation to a close reading of J.R.R. Tolkien’s novel *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*¹ which was published in 1937 and is considered one of the classics of modern fantasy literature. Although the novel is commonly classified as a children’s book, it will be shown how Tolkien and other scholars of the field dismiss the idea of fantasy literature being limited to a children audience. Thus, I will discuss the heroic profile of *The Hobbit*’s protagonist based on models of heroes found in other fantastic works written for both adults and children. In this thesis I will therefore try to answer the following research questions: How are the concepts of fantasy literature and heroism defined, and how are they interrelated? What kinds of heroism are represented in classical and modern pieces of fantasy literature? What kind of heroism is represented by

¹ Hereafter referred to as *The Hobbit*.

Bilbo Baggins? And finally: How does the ambivalence of the modern concept of heroism affect the depiction of Bilbo Baggins?

In order to be able to discuss the concept of heroism in the literary genre of the fantastic in detail, I will start this thesis by defining fantasy literature. In the course of this, I will discuss the meaning of the term fantasy with regards to its connection to the notions of reality, imagination and faërie. This discussion will be followed by a historical survey of the fantasy genre. Lastly, commonly found elements of fantasy literature, i.e. themes, settings, characters, and narrative techniques, will be examined.

The next part of this thesis will concern the concept of heroism in fantasy literature. It will be revealed that the concept is essentially ambivalent, as different literary eras define the concept differently. After providing an overview of characteristics of heroes and heroines in the literature of the fantastic, I will address the classical and the modern concept of heroism found within fantastic texts. Concepts developed in other literary eras will be disregarded as the historical overview of the fantasy literature genre will show that the general form and concept of the genre was mainly based on an ancient model until the modern revolution of the genre. I therefore believe that the comparison of two examples which are as far apart as possible with regards to the historical context will provide the most revealing insights into the evolution of literary heroism. After linking the examples of classical and modern heroism to the notion of anti-heroism, I will briefly present Joseph Campbell's notion of the hero's journey and discuss it in the context of fantasy literature.

After the theoretical discussions of fantasy literature and heroism are completed, I will analyze J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* with regards to the heroic profile of its protagonist Bilbo Baggins. In order to answer the question of what kind of fantasy hero Bilbo Baggins is, I will first introduce the book and contextualize it within the genre of fantasy literature. Afterwards, I will discuss Bilbo Baggins as an anti-hero as well as a hero. This last part will consist of a comparison of Bilbo as a classical and as a modern hero which will reveal that the ambivalence of heroism is essential in development of the heroic profile of Bilbo Baggins.

1. Fantasy Literature

To write a thesis about fantasy literature and its components necessarily requires the author to first define the matter. Although the topic has been discussed by many scholars and critics, no

inclusive definition of the term seems to have been presented so far. The apparent peculiarity of this fact is emphasized by the number of researchers who start their texts on fantasy literature by indicating that a definition of the term is still lacking. For instance, Schmitz-Emans notes: “Dem weit verbreiteten Interesse des lesenden Publikums an ‚literarischer Phantastik‘ korrespondiert eine ebenso weitreichende Ratlosigkeit, wenn Auskunft darüber erteilt werden soll, was darunter denn eigentlich zu verstehen sei” (53). On a similar note, Jackson states in her introduction, “it has proved difficult to develop an adequate definition of fantasy as a literary kind” (13), and Clute and Grant call fantasy literature “a most extraordinarily porous term” that “has been used to mop up vast deposits of story which this culture or that – and this era or that – deems unrealistic” (Clute and Grant 337). Ever since the term *fantastique* was first coined for the literary phenomenon by French writer Charles Nodier in 1830, it has been under constant discussion (Whitehead 353). One plausible reasoning for this dilemma has been given by Burcher et al., who simply suggest that a final definition has not yet been found because “[f]orms are changing [and] genre lines are blurring” (226). In other words, literature’s essential adaptation to changing times takes its toll by complicating defining matters for researchers of literary studies. The question whether or not fantasy literature can be categorized as a genre has been intensely debated and further complicates matters.²

However hard arriving at a conclusive definition may seem, a number of researchers have approached the topic by defining the inherent content of fantasy literature. For instance, Schmitz-Emans studies fantasy literature by focusing on the fantastic and its opposites. She claims that the fantastic can only be categorized in terms of its opposite, i.e. “the non-fantastic”. Consequently, Schmitz-Emans lists the real and the realistic as well as the mundane and the possible as potential counterparts of the fantastic. Based on these assumptions she concludes that fantasy literature can be defined as “Literatur des ‘Anderen’, als literarischer Ausdruck der ‘Abweichung’” (56). Similarly, Burcher et al. emphasize the occurrence of non-realistic elements in their tentative definition of fantasy literature. In their understanding, “any work that contains magic or other elements that cannot be understood by the rules of reality” can be called fantasy literature (Burcher et al. 227). Jackson arrives at an even vaguer conclusion, stating that “[t]he ‘fantastic’ derives from the Latin, *phantasticus*, [...] meaning to make visible or manifest. In this general sense, all imaginary activity is fantastic, all literary works are fantasies” (13). As a further step she refers to the term fantasy

² See below for a further discussion of this controversy.

as “any literature which does not give priority to realistic representation” (Jackson 13). Considering this characteristic of fantasy literature, Jackson concludes that fantasy literature violates dominant normative assumptions of reality. She thereby argues that fantasy literature can be seen as subversive in that it “disturb[s] ‘rules’ of artistic representation and literature’s reproduction of the ‘real’” (Jackson 13).

This last viewpoint is very interesting since it emphasizes the fantasy writers’ conscious decision to disregard existing norms. It can be claimed that fantasy literature can fulfil a range of functions that can be directly ascribed to the writers’ idea of a “conscious breaking free from reality” (Holman and Harmon 192). Jackson believes that fantasy literature writers create subversive art and are thereby able to influence their readers’ perception of reality (15). More radically, LeGuin writes about fantasy: “Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous; and *it will change you*” (LeGuin 93, her emphasis). This perspective has been shared by a number of critics. For instance, Filmer-Davis maintains that literature, and especially fantasy literature, is necessary in humans’ socialization. She quotes a critic stating “whatever else literary texts are, and whatever pleasure they may afford us, they are also expressions of the values and assumptions of a culture and a significant way of embedding readers in those values and assumptions” (Yolen, qtd. in Filmer-Davis 61). Hence, readers are introduced to a society’s standards and values through literature. The “stories can change the way readers, especially young readers, relate to the world”, Filmer-Davis suggests (61). Consequently, she links the idea of socialization through literature to the development of an identity and the notion of the self. After quoting LeGuin maintaining that fantasy literature may not represent factuality but may nevertheless be “true”, Filmer-Davis states that it can empower readers as well as offer support in challenging life situations. By identifying with fantastic characters, they can escape reality and overcome the challenges alongside their heroes (Filmer-Davis 67). Interestingly, escape has also been claimed to be a “disease” of fantasy literature in the sense that “readers and writers of fantasy are fleeing from reality” (Shippey viii). Among others, this idea has led to the often quoted perception of fantasy literature as less valuable than literature set in reality.

The concept of escape is considered as one of the most important functions in the first coherent academic essay discussing fantasy which was published under the name “On Fairy Stories” in 1939. It was written by J.R.R. Tolkien and introduced several seminal terms concerning fantasy theory, such as the two other functions of fantasy literature in addition to escape: recovery and consolation. By recovery he means a “regaining of a clear view” of the

familiar that is not perceived in its completeness anymore (Tolkien, "Fairy Stories" 53). Or, as Filmer-Davis phrases it, recovery is "the recreation in the mundane world of a sense of wonder which has been stirred by encounters with the imaginary worlds of story" (63). The third main function of fantasy literature according to Tolkien is consolation. He asserts that fantasy stories necessarily need to provide a happy ending prompted by a "sudden joyous 'turn'" which he calls "eucatastrophe" (62). This function is related to escape as "these elements provide for their readers a sense of safety and security to be found in story if nowhere else" (Filmer-Davis 64).

If fantasy literature is then defined by its inherent fantastic content and its functions, it may be regarded both as a literary mode and a genre. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* associates the term mode with "method, manner and style" (Cuddon 515), while style is characterized as "every conceivable aspect of [the writer's] language and the way in which he uses it" (872). Consequently, it may be concluded that fantasy literature is necessarily written in the fantastic mode since the language used is that of a fantastic world. Furthermore, the style the writers adhere to can be presumed to be that of fantasy. Yet, this is the exact reason why many scholars prefer to discuss fantasy literature as a genre rather than a mode. According to *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* genre is defined as "literary type or class" (342). If a mode is characterized by a specific style, it may be suggested that style itself can then only be defined by genre. Rhyming lines may refer to poetics, while a narrating style may be found in novels. Combining theories of mode and genre, Angelskär points out that "[m]odes generally appear as a mixture of one genre with another", and he explains that "modes are made by using a set of characteristics from one genre to influence another genre" (14). Fantasy should therefore first be categorized as a genre before it can be viewed as mode. However, the suggestion of fantasy literature as a genre has both strong advocates and opponents. The main reason for a debate about fantasy literature as a genre can be found in the many forms fantasy literature can take. For instance, horror stories, science fiction or fairy tales can all be categorized as fantasy literature. Nonetheless, they are nothing alike. While horror stories "are intended to evoke the feeling they are named for" (Pringle 8), science fiction is based on scientific ideas, and fairy tales are aimed to simultaneously entertain and educate children. It has consequently led to much debate about whether fantasy literature itself should constitute a literary genre, or whether it should rather be viewed as a subgenre of the fantastic as a literary mode.

Supporting the latter argumentation, Schallegger states that a number of elaborate scholars have “implicitly or explicitly” defined fantasy “as a genre (or sub-genre) of fantastic fiction” (Schallegger 32). One of the proponents of this viewpoint is Gary K. Wolfe, who identified fantasy, alongside science fiction and horror, as a subgenre of the “fantastic genres” (3). Similarly, Meister regards the fantastic as an umbrella term for many subgenres, such as the vampire story. He holds that “[t]o state that the fantastic is a category that cuts across genres and is, at the same time, in itself a genre should strike one as contradictory”. Further, he identifies the main reason for the paradox in the fact that “in our current use of the term ‘fantastic’ we do not understand its applicability to be constrained by criteria such as medium and historical or cultural setting” (Meister 23). The fact that genre narratives are normally specifically bound to a medium makes it impossible for him to consider the fantastic as a genre. Consequently, he states: “If the fantastic were a genre term then we should be able to apply it in a similar way as other genre terms, for example, *Bildungsroman* or *detective novel*” (Meister 23). Correspondingly, Jackson thinks that fantasy cannot be called a genre, but rather a subgenre of the fantastic. And she further declares: “It seems appropriate that such a protean form has so successfully resisted generic classification” (Jackson 13).

Other scholars have presented arguments to categorize fantasy as a genre. For instance, Eşberk remarks that “[w]hile some others believe that the ‘fantastic’ as a literary genre has its origins in the ancient literature and throughout history, by means of interactions and interrelations of its forms, it has developed as a distinguished genre” (139). Further, she thinks that “fantasy literature forms cohesive patterns and is best understood as a genre in its own right” (Eşberk 144). Likewise, Mendlesohn treats fantasy as a distinct genre, defining it “as a number of fuzzy sets determined by the mode in which the fantastic enters the text” (Mendlesohn and James 4). She also notes “form cannot be wholly abstracted from content” (Mendlesohn xvi), which ties into Eşberk’s remark about the genre’s distinguishable form and links the fantasy genre to its inherent fantastic content.

Taking all arguments mentioned into consideration, I concur with Mendlesohn’s definition of fantasy literature as a literary genre that is characterized by a fantastic mode. It may follow certain forms and functions that are characteristic of fantasy literature, but may not always be perceivable as such. Fantastic elements may be found within a literary text that is still not considered part of fantasy literature. Examples for this might be Margaret Atwood’s award-winning novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) or the Bible, which both contain some kind of fantastic elements or aspects, yet are not regarded as true fantasy literature. Consequently, I

also believe that the fantastic should not be limited to one genre but rather “cuts across genres” (Meister 23). Meister’s assertion that the fantastic cannot touch other genres seems shortsighted. Even if Meister spoke about the fantastic as a mode, the argument could be easily refuted by citing Angelskär’s definition of modes which “are made by using a set of characteristics from one genre to influence another genre” (14), as quoted above. Hence, a genre is not defined by excluding specific elements associated with another genre. The fantastic can therefore be both: a genre, and a category cutting across genres. Since the terms fantasy and the fantastic are used interchangeably here, it could be argued that fantasy literature cannot be perceived as a genre category on its own. Some critics prefer to employ the term fantastic when discussing modes, and Clute and Grant assert that the term fantasy refers to the structure, but not to the form of a narrative (337). With regards to this matter, I concur in Sandner’s opinion who argues that the differentiation between those two terms can be valuable for specific arguments. “[H]owever, for a general overview of fantastic material, such distinctions only obscure work that, no matter how it is classified or when it was written, attempts to explore the presence of the impossible in literature and in our experience of life itself” (Sandner 22). Even if the distinction between the two terms is blurred in this paper, the question remains what fantasy, or the fantastic, really is. The following section will discuss the term in more detail.

1.1. Definition of Fantasy

The term fantasy has already been approached as a literary genre in the previous chapter, but the meaning behind the term has not been closely discussed yet. In order to present the multiple layers of meaning linked to fantasy as comprehensively as possible, it seems appropriate to introduce Tolkien’s discussion of the term. The reason for this lies in the significant impact his essay “On Fairy Stories” had on studies of fantasy literature. In this essay he describes fantasy as “the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 40). However, Tolkien does not define the term further, but rather presents principles of his definition.

In his essay “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy”, James states that “[f]antasy, for Tolkien, was a way of getting closer to the important things of life than the realistic novel ever could” (69). In fact, Tolkien writes about fantasy stories, “[t]hat the images are of things not in the primary world (if that indeed is possible) is a virtue not a vice” (45). For him, there

is a clear connection between fantasy and reality, which has also been discussed by other critics of the matter. Other terms connected to the notion of fantasy are imagination as well as *faërie*, which both shall be discussed in the following sections.

1.1.1. Reality and Fantasy

Among those critics who discuss the relations between fantasy and reality are Holman and Harmon, who suggest that “[f]antasy may be employed merely for whimsical delight, or it may be the medium for serious comment on reality” (192). This relates directly to Jackson’s following observation: “[A] literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it.” And in the following she assumes “that the literary fantastic is never ‘free’” (Jackson 3). Assuming that “social context” refers to political, cultural, and socio-economical settings, it may be concluded that Jackson adapts a Marxist view on the fantasy genre. By implication, this means that writers of fantasy narratives create stories of the unreal that have repercussions in as well as gained inspiration from the real world. However, it still needs to be defined for the sake of clarity how the terms real and unreal relate here.

Todorov asserts that “the supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and proof” (Todorov 82), meaning that fantasy is created by the process of verbalizing the unreal. Chen develops the thought further by stating “‘language creates reality’ or language refers to ‘another possible reality’” (Chen, “Narrative Devices” 396). It might therefore be assumed that there are two possible realities: The original, or primary, reality that readers and writers recognize as their own world, and the literary reality which is presented in literature. Tolkien explains that the writers of fantasy narratives create “secondary worlds”: “Inside it, what [the writer] relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world” (12). He therefore claims that what is presented as real in the narrative does not necessarily need to be real in the primary world. Nevertheless, as far as the narrative is concerned, the related events are real in the sense that readers are willing to believe and accept them as real. Tolkien insists that this state of mind should not be called “willing suspension of disbelief”, as others have described it, since this would reveal a true disbelief of the narrated story, showing that the readers “think they ought to like the tale” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 37). On the contrary, he concludes, “if they really liked it, for itself, they would not have to suspend disbelief: they would believe—

in this sense” (37). Reality, as it seems, is then created by the readers themselves by accepting the fantastic stories as if they were real. However, Tolkien holds that fantasy has to be firmly rooted in reality to be perceivable as such. He states, “creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it.” It is thus not claimed that readers cannot distinguish between the reality of the primary world and the fantasy story’s reality. They rather accept the literary world as it were real. Tolkien adds as an example: “If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen” (51). It might therefore be concluded that although fantasy is not real, its content still needs to be based on a reality recognizable by readers in order for them to make sense of it. As mentioned above, Todorov thinks that “the supernatural is born of language”, and in this sense the writers’ words and the readers’ minds together create the real worlds of fantasy literature. Yet, both writers and readers need to be able to relate to the story’s underlying basis in reality to successfully make meaning of it. With this in mind, it becomes clearer what Todorov meant by claiming that readers need to realize that what constitutes an exception in their own world may be perceived as the rule in the literary world (Todorov 174). It is therefore the acceptance of the recognizable, but distorted reality of the primary world within the fantastic that renders the literature exciting.

1.1.2. Imagination and Fantasy

It is obvious from the discussions presented so far that fantasy and imagination are closely linked together. If fantasy is assumed to be “the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 40), the emphasis is put on the act of actively creating fantasy. Jackson’s concept of fantasy as subversive art also focuses on this idea. And Zipes believes that “[i]ndeed, all genuine works of art involve fantasy, the labor of the brain and imagination” (4). Although these critics present the terms as dependent on each other, imagination and fantasy have often been used as synonyms, as suggested by Holman and Harmon (192). Yet, one term is clearly the reason for the other’s existence. Considering Wolfe’s quote of 18th century German philologist, Johann Jakob Bodmer, stating that imagination “not only places the real before our eyes in a vivid image and makes distant things present, but also, with a power more potent than that of magic, it draws that which does not exist out of the state of potentiality, gives it a semblance of reality and makes us see, hear and feel these new creations” (qtd. in Wolfe 6), this becomes especially apparent. However,

both are assumed to be “distant”, i.e. not present, in order for imagination to take place. As Tolkien states, imagination includes “images of things that are not only ‘not actually present,’ but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all, or are generally believed not to be found there” (45). Hence, it seems that imagination can put the real as well as the unreal in a person’s mind’s eye. Obviously, this is where the point of commonality of fantasy and imagination can be found.

A great number of researchers draw a distinctive line between imagination and fantasy, which can be ascribed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge who distinguished between imagination and fancy in his *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817 (Cuddon 306). He found that imagination can be either primary or secondary, with the former mediating between “sensation and perception”, and the latter working as “an echo of the former [...]; dissolv[ing], diffus[ing], dissipat[ing], in order to recreate” (Cuddon 307). As Milburn shows, Tolkien’s own definition of imagination as “[t]he human mind [...] capable of forming mental images of things not actually present” (44) was partly influenced by Coleridge’s earlier definition of secondary imagination. Tolkien then opposes this notion of imagination to “mere image-making, ascribed to the operations of Fancy (a reduced and depreciatory form of the older word Fantasy)”, which is imagination employing “the power of giving ideal creations the inner consistency of reality” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 44). He calls this “[a]rt, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation” (45), and in that sense “[t]he fairy-story is indeed a form of image-making, but of an artistic kind” (Kelly 198). In a further step, Tolkien links both these aspects of imagination by the term fantasy, “which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story” (45). Kelly concludes: “The power to realise imagination he [i.e. Tolkien] names as ‘fantasy’. It transcends the primary world through its artistic creativity, a higher and quite powerful form of art in general” (198). Similarly, Cuddon writes that “it seems that imagination is regarded as the superior faculty, the transubstantiator of experience; while fancy [...] is a kind of assistant to imagination” (307).

Fantasy stories are not the only available evidence of a working imagination. Even without the intention of telling stories or selling books, people have always produced imaginary worlds; they have done so in their dreams. Interestingly, stories and tales about fantastic worlds have often been interpreted as dreams. Schmitz-Emans notes that this is a typical reaction to an irritating experience which cannot be explained by laws of reality (Schmitz-

Emans 78). On a similar note, LeGuin observes that “[t]he great fantasies, myths, and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious, in the *language* of the unconscious” (62). Furthermore, Tolkien mentions the similar effects dreams and fantasies have on the recipients. He claims that they both offer the experience of delving into secondary worlds which feel real in the moment thereof (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 49). However, just because both fantasies and dreams are products of the imagination and bear some resemblance with regards to content and effect, they should not be confused. Tolkien asserts that in “[d]reaming [...] there is no Art” (45), and consequently no fantasy as well. As a matter of fact, he specifically excludes “any story that uses the machinery of Dream, the dreaming of actual human sleep, to explain the apparent occurrence of its marvels” (17). He argues as follows: “[I]f a waking writer tells you that his tale is only a thing imagined in his sleep, he cheats deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 18). Hence, it can be concluded that it is of great interest to Tolkien that a fantasy story is presented as “true”. “But since the fairy-story deals with ‘marvels,’ it cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a figment or illusion” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 18). Consequently, Kelly holds, “a genuine fairy-story will break out of any frame placed upon it” (193). With this in mind, Tolkien also disregards Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* from 1865 as “fairy story”, and rather categorizes it as a “dream story” (Tolkien, “Fairy Stories” 18). Tolkien’s influence on the fantasy genre becomes especially apparent with regards to a normalization of the fantastic in stories. It was exactly through his argumentation that writers accepted the possibility to present their fantasy as is, without hiding it behind dream frames (Chen, “Tolkien’s Style” 4).

1.1.3. Faërie and Fantasy

In the previous chapter the term faërie has been introduced. This term has gained some attention from critics since Tolkien used it in his essay “On Fairy Stories” to discuss his notion of fantasy.

Tolkien starts “On Fairy Stories” by explaining what he means by fairy story: “[S]tories about Fairy, that is Faërie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (14). He does not limit this realm to magical beings such as elves or dwarves. On the contrary, Tolkien believes that additionally “it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things

that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted". And he adds: "Most good 'fairy-stories' are about the *aventures* of men in the Perilous Realm" (14). Consequently, Tolkien makes a definition of the fairy story conditional on that of *faërie*. However, he declares he "will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. *Faërie* cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible". Nevertheless, he later writes that *faërie* is best translated as "magic", while positioning it at the very opposite end of the scale of a "laborious, scientific, magician" (14-15), and thinking the notion rather alludes to nature (28). In later parts of his essay he presents this magic as the "supernatural" and also inexplicable element of fairy stories. However, he dismisses this thought again by stating, "[m]agic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World" (49), which does not concur with his own definition of fantasy. Consequently, *faërie* can be understood as a kind of state of mind in which enchantment empowers people to believe in the real in fairy stories. Without *faërie* there is no such thing as fantasy, as the magic thereof loses its power without this kind of enchantment.

Numerous critics, such as Flieger, Kelly, or Watson, have discussed Tolkien's approach to *faërie* and fantasy. Among them is David Sandner, who also addresses the relation between fantasy and childhood. This connection may seem obvious since fairy stories and fairy tales can be seen as "a major taproot for modern fantasy" (Mendlesohn and James 14), and are associated with children rather than with adult fantasy literature. Tolkien writes in "On Fairy Stories", "[i]t is usually assumed that children are the natural or the specially appropriate audience for fairy-stories" (33). And he also states that "I do not deny that there is a truth in Andrew Lang's words [...]: 'He who would enter into the Kingdom of *Faërie* should have the heart of a little child.' For that possession is necessary to all high adventure, into kingdoms both less and far greater than *Faërie*" (42). Interestingly, Mendlesohn and James remark that fairy tales were originally intended for an adult readership, which is still noticeable in the original and earlier versions of, for instance, Anderson's or Grimms' famous tales. Although these versions were more brutal and frightening than the ones told today, the fairy tale "came increasingly to be seen as a genre aimed primarily at children" (Mendlesohn and James 14). Thus, Sandner describes how fantasy stories have long been designated for children, suggesting that they were meant to help them develop their imagination. He concludes that fantasy stories signified a representation of a "childhood lost" (6-7). In other words, fantasy stories may create a nostalgic link to a once forgotten past. However, as Alexander explains, until the 1950s, and the emergence of a finally successful fantasy genre through Tolkien's and

Lewis' works, these stories were widely disregarded by public opinion as only suitable for children since solely realist novels were regarded as "serious and 'adult'" (354).

Adults are clearly just as great readers of fantasy literature as children are. Especially considering the definition of faërie presented above, it should deem one as only natural to also include adults into the expected readership of fantasy literature. In her famous essay "Why Are Americans Afraid Of Dragons?" LeGuin presents a critical view on adults', and it may be assumed on the general scholarly world's, dismissal of fantasy literature. She writes:

For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it's true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom. (LeGuin 44)

In that sense, faërie, or "the realm or state in which fairies have their being", can be defined as an imaginary space in which both adults and children experience encounters with the fantastic. It is neither graspable, nor clearly definable, but it is, nevertheless, a real world in which the truth of reality is present.

1.2. Historical Development of Fantasy Literature

The fantastic can be found in numerous stories and tales since antiquity.³ Mendlesohn and James write, "[t]he earliest forms of written fiction that we have from the ancient world are works that we might understand as fantasy and which have influenced many modern fantasy writers: stories about gods and heroes." These stories would be considered myths or legends today. Mendlesohn and James explain that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as well as Homer's *Odyssey* represent early examples of what is considered fantasy literature today, and they state that these can be seen as precursors of today's fantasy literature. One of the earliest fantastic tales in English is the epic poem of *Beowulf*, while most of the information about Old English deities needs to be inferred from Icelandic tales from the 13th century. These myths and sagas were translated from Icelandic to English in the 19th century and influenced many writers of fantasy literature, such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Alan Garner, or Neil Gaiman. However, even more fantastic tales were told in Celtic traditions, such as Ireland or Wales.

In the Middle Ages, fantasy stories were mostly found in the form of the romance, such as the tales about King Arthur. This kind of chivalric literature was often highly politically

³ This chapter is based on Mendlesohn & James 7-23.

connoted. Mendlesohn and James note that “the Arthurian cycle was periodically revived to support the English monarchy”, which also explains the revival of these kinds of stories in the mid-nineteenth century, as it “gave a moral authority to the aristocracy” (10). At the end of the 17th century, fairy tales began to develop from old folk tales and were most notably popularized by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. These stories, in which fairies and other fantastic beings were interacting with humans, were mainly written for a bourgeois readership. Later, original fairy tales were created that were aimed at a more general audience. The most successful 19th century writer was Hans Christian Andersen, who wrote fairy tales “in which right and wrong, good and evil are obscured and the world does not end happily or well” (12). The Western centeredness of European scholars started to change when *The Thousand and One Nights* was translated from Arabic into French by Antoine Galland at the end of the 17th century, and by the 19th century those had been incorporated into Western tradition. Around the same time Chinese and Japanese ghost and fantasy stories were brought to Europe and received great recognition. At the beginning of the 20th century, people recognized the apparent similarities in structure and theme in fairy tales from around the world when anthropologist Andrew Lang published eleven collections of fairy tales.

Around the close of the 19th century, a whole new subgenre emerged: the Gothic. The Enlightenment had led to the perception that “[t]he world [was] something one could both understand and control” (Mendlesohn and James 14). This idea was turned into a specific literary mode, the Gothic, “in which this surface world is a delusion” (Mendlesohn and James 14). This fantastic subgenre is characterized by a tension between “an imminent understanding of religion and increasing scepticism about the possibility of supernatural influence in the world”, and features “a surface story which will be proved wrong” (Mendlesohn and James 15-16). A subversion of the “visible world” is depicted that writers of Gothic novels use in order to shock their readers. As Wolfe points out, the Gothic genre would later produce two other subgenres of fantasy literature: horror fiction, and science fiction; the latter being characterized by a rejection of supernatural elements (7). The decades to come, however, were influenced by romantic fairy tales. This phase was only interrupted by Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. It is characterized by “the space Carroll created for nonsense and surrealism, the very realistic portrayal of a child suffering the whim of crazy adults, and the creation of a protagonist who was very firmly a child with no didactic responsibilities to the reader” (Mendlesohn and James 20), and influenced the way children’s tales were written at later times.

Although much of today's fantasy literature is influenced by the developments discussed above, for instance common themes, or characters, "the movement which most contributed to the look and feel of the kind of fantasy that would dominate in the bookshops in the later twentieth century, was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood." The aim of the Brotherhood was to reinforce "the supposed ideals of medieval craftsmanship (before Raphael)" (Mendlesohn and James 20). A growing interest in the study of medieval documents and traditional histories led to new translations, and national epics were produced. However, most importantly, the Pre-Raphaelite William Morris changed the way in which fantastic worlds are created. Mendlesohn and James explain that "[p]revious fantasy writers had donned a cloak of belief that the fantastic could occur in our world, or had provided a shell structure (such as a dream) to allow the reader to travel" (22). Contrarily, Morris puts emphasis on "construct[ing] a world *as if it is the only world that exists*" (Mendlesohn and James 22, their emphasis). As shown in the previous chapter of this thesis, Morris' presentation of fantastic worlds still can be found in today's discussions on the perception of the fantastic. However, it was not until the appearance of the so-called "Inklings", a group of Oxford scholars around C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien discussing their own writings of fantasy, that fantasy literature as it is known today emerged.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1953-1954) was called "the most influential work on the genre" (Korpua 54), and Tolkien himself was named "Author of the Century" by Tom Shippey. Majorly influenced by Morris' concept of fantastic worlds (Massey 2007), the Inklings set the tone of fantasy novels of the 20th and 21st century. Especially Tolkien's concept of secondary worlds was seminal. James writes, "Tolkien's greatest achievement [...] was in normalizing the idea of the secondary world [...] This has become so standard in modern fantasy that it is not easy to realize how unusual it was before Tolkien" (65). And he adds: "After 1955 fantasy writers no longer had to explain away their worlds by framing them as dreams, travellers' tales, or by providing them with any fictional link to our own world at all" (James 65). He further explains that this development resulted in a "fantasy boom", starting in the 1970s, and leading to the commercially successful emergence of the genre. At the end of the 1990s the first book of the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) was published, becoming one of the most commercially successful books of all times (James 73-77).

It can be concluded that the emergence of the fantasy genre cannot be dated back to the last century. On the contrary, fantastic stories have been told for thousands of years. All of these stories, have influenced fantasy tropes, fantastic characters, or concepts of fantasy. Subgenres

such as Quest Fantasies, Horror Stories, or Sword and Sorcery, can be retraced to earlier fantasies, while recurring storylines have shaped the readers' expectations. Also, current representations of protagonists and heroes in fantasy literature have been heavily influenced by the mythical tales of classical antiquity. Later chapters of this thesis will discuss representations of heroism in fantasy literature with regards to their historical development. Meanwhile, the chronological overview given provides the theoretical background for the next chapter. Since fantasy literature is still not always easy to recognize, this short survey of the history of fantasy literature can be used to reveal some of the most common elements in fantasy literature.

1.3. Typical Elements in Fantasy Literature

After discussing several approaches to the term fantasy and fantasy literature as well as considering some historical context of the emergence of the genre, it might now be interesting to answer the question what exactly constitutes a fantasy. As far as the difference between real and unreal, between reality and fantasy, goes, this question should be considered as answered by now. However, with regards to the actual content of fantasy stories, nothing concrete has been said so far. Although the last chapter hinted at some common traits, it might now be interesting to closely examine the typical elements that make it possible for the reader to recognize a story as a piece of fantasy literature.

In her essay "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie", LeGuin writes about fantasy literature: "The general assumption is that, if there are dragons or hippogriffs in a book, or if it takes place in a vaguely Keltic or Near Eastern medieval setting, or if magic is done in it, then it's a fantasy. This is a mistake" (94). Hence, she dismisses the idea that there are specific ingredients that constitute a fantasy story. Nevertheless, it can be argued that there are certain elements which possibly indicate that the text at hand is a fantasy story. Aside from LeGuin's reference to fantastic creatures and places most notably influenced by Scandinavian or Celtic mythic tales, other elements may hint at the fantastic genre as well. For instance, Mendlesohn and James suggest that "magical transformations, strange monsters, sorcerers, dragons and the existence of a supernatural world" (7) are common traits of fantasy literature. Comparing LeGuin's and Mendlesohn's and James' positions on the matter, it can be concluded that there are indeed elements that are more often associated with fantasy than with other genres. However, it should not be forgotten that these elements are not unique to fantasy literature, and might also

occur in other literatures, such as myth, or dream narratives. Consequently, the elements do not identify, but rather hint at fantasy literature. In order to decide whether or not a text constitutes a piece of fantasy literature it should, therefore, be analyzed with regards to the definitions of fantasy presented in previous sections. Hence, the scope of the next part of the thesis is not exhaustive. It rather provides a survey of themes, settings, and characters commonly found in fantasy literature and can only steer in a direction for the ultimate decision.

1.3.1. Themes

There have been a number of attempts to create a catalogue of common themes and topics in fantasy literature. Schmitz-Emans mentions two of these, which, according to her, both miserably fail to present a satisfactory complete list of fantastic themes. They rather comprise modes and themes, typical characters, as well as psychological effects of fantasy literature. Schmitz-Emans concludes that fantasy literature cannot be identified by certain topics and motifs that are covered. She rather prefers to view fantasy literature as stories about triggers of fantastic effects in a distorted world. Therefore, Schmitz-Emans suggests that fantasy literature is mainly categorized by stories about distortion of the self-evident, such as identity, continuity, and causality of events (103-104).

Considering this view on topics in fantasy literature, it could be argued that the often depicted battle between good and evil represents a struggle to find one's identity. Fantasy literature, thus, shows how a perfectly fine and normal situation can change through a sudden and unexpected event. Clute and Grant call this original stage in fantasy stories "bondage" and define it as "reality-distorting constriction, [which] is normally signaled in fantasy by wrongness, by a sense that the world as a whole has gone askew, that the story of things has been occluded" (339). Consequently, the protagonist has to react and find their way back to how the world was before the life-changing event. Often it appears that the initial world is irrevocably lost, and a new rule of order is established by the end of the story. This becomes especially apparent in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Ring* when the protagonist Frodo is not able to return home. Although he wins the battle against Sauron, Frodo is changed by his encounter with evil in a way that makes it impossible for him to reassume his old identity. To him, everything has changed and his old self is lost. Similarly, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is based on the fact that Harry's world view is shaken when he is declared a wizard by

Hagrid. He has to assume his new identity as “The Boy Who Lived”, and struggles to find his place in a, to him, strange world. There, he is confronted with the evil Lord Voldemort who becomes part of him, even in a literal sense. In *Harry Potter* the protagonist has to accept the evil inside himself before the final stage of consolation can take place. Clute and Grant term this stage “recognition” to “describe the moment at which – after penetrating the labyrinths of story-gone-astray, the protagonist finally gazes upon the shriveled heart of the thinned world and sees what to do” (339). Of course, the battle between good and evil is often literally depicted in fantasy stories as well. The previously mentioned *Harry Potter* series is a classic example of a fantasy narrative in which the battle between the “good” hero and the “evil” villain is at the heart of the story. However, non-traditional depictions of this battle can also be found in fantastic literature. For instance, it could be argued that the characters in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* do not have to face one impersonated evil, but that they rather have to defeat their desire for power which is caused by an impalpable evil, a “Shadow”.⁴ Or, as Shippey puts it, the story’s goal is “not to find or gain something but to reject and destroy something” (114); this “something” being the possession of power. In this case, the battle between good and evil could also be interpreted as the protagonists’ conscious choice between right and wrong.

Atteberry claims that fear is at the basis of fantasy literature, and this viewpoint creates an interesting perspective on the aforementioned battle between good and evil. He states that fear is “a reliable source of suspense, conflict, and reader identification” (1), and is, therefore, incorporated in most fantasy stories. At the same time he writes, “[i]n a fairy tale, the hero is expected to face fear but not to be overwhelmed by it” (2). Here, the term evil is substituted by fear. However, there are many types of fears, and many are represented in fantasy stories. Fear of the unknown can be found in texts of the genre as well as the fear of loss, or the fear of death. In the Brothers Grimm’s famous fairy tale *Snow White*, the evil Stepmother is driven by fear of losing her youth and beauty, while the White Witch in C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) fears to lose her power and terrorizes everyone, and everything, as a result. On the other hand, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series (2005-2008) represent the fear of death in the light of a vampire romance: in order to be forever together, the two protagonists have to defeat death and live beyond. Especially the last example can be seen as a kind of boundary crossing in the sense of Schmitz-Emans’ notion of the self-evident’s distortion in fantasy literature. She writes: “Wichtig für die alltägliche Orientierung

⁴ For a further discussion on Tolkien’s depiction of shadows and his views on evil, see Shippey 128-143.

in der Welt sind [...] bestimmte Differenzierungen, welche [...] durch Texte der phantastischen Literatur unterlaufen oder in Frage gestellt werden können. Zu ihnen gehört vor allem die [...] Differenzierung zwischen ‘Lebendigem’ und ‘Totem’” (Schmitz-Emans 104). Hence, stories about the threshold between life and death distort the mundane and force the readers, but sometimes also the stories’ characters themselves, to adopt new perspectives on presumably established truths. This idea relates to the aforementioned change which the characters in fantasy narratives have gone through at the end of the story. However, now it has been shown that this appears to be a consequence of overcoming fears. Consequently, Schmitz-Emans’ concept of a distortion of identity in fantasy literature holds true.

This “transformation brought about by experience” may not only lead to a character’s change, but also to their growth as a person. Hence, this development can be seen as an element of the *Bildungsroman* genre to be found in fantasy literature. The genre of *Bildungsroman*, or “novel of self-development” (Lowe 405), is characterized by exactly this growth of the protagonist. However, Herbrich states that “[w]ährend der Held des Abenteuerromans im Konflikt mit der Außenwelt steh[t], kämpf[t] derjenige des Bildungsromans ‚mit und um sich selbst‘” (69). In that sense, fantasy stories are clearly distinct from *Bildungsromanen*, since the former depicts the contact to the outside world as just as, if not more, important as the inner conflict of the protagonist. However, there are undeniable traces of the genre incorporated in fantasy literature. For instance, a feeling of otherness is frequently depicted in fantasy literature, such as when the hero enters a strange and distant secondary world. This can be compared to the commonly found alienation from society in the *Bildungsroman*, which creates a sense of otherness felt by the protagonist (Lowe 412). More generally, the themes of personal growth, maturation as well as the layout of a fantasy narrative as “hero-centered” can be often found in both genres, which clearly establish a thematic link.

1.3.2. Settings

A piece of fantasy literature is never only a narration about ordinary people experiencing extraordinary, or fantastic, events. It is also the setting in which these events occur that evoke a feeling for the fantastic. Often, these settings bear resemblances to other literary eras. Ekman points out that the settings in fantasy stories are often “borrowed and adapted from numerous places” (7). For instance, medieval tales, works of renaissance writers such as

Shakespeare and Dante, or Celtic myths have served as sources of inspiration to numerous fantasy writers.

Ekman writes: “Fantasy offers possibilities to create fictive worlds that are fundamentally different from our own, even in cases when the setting masquerades as a copy of the world we live in”. Still, he rejects the thought that setting should be a defining characteristic of fantasy literature (Ekman 2). At the same time he claims that “setting is as important as character and plot” (Ekman 2). On a similar note, other critics have suggested that settings and landscape in fantasy literature should be regarded as distinct characters themselves. For instance, Mathews holds that “geography and setting have a numinous value and function almost as characters and symbols in the work” (39), while Mendlesohn observes that Tolkien’s presentation of landscape mimics that of a “participant in the adventure” (35). She also explains that “for Lewis [landscape] must have purpose: it is there to be useful and to be reacted to” (Mendlesohn 34). There are, however, also different approaches to settings in fantasy literature. Mendlesohn writes about instances in Lewis’ works where “landscape is not expected to speak; it merely accompanies the events. [...] The landscape is there to be moved through” (Mendlesohn 34).

The settings of fantastic text are not only crucial to the reading experience, but can also be helpful for critics trying to establish a basic categorization of the genre. Most notably, Mendlesohn has used the notions of landscape and settings as a basis to propose four types of fantasy literature, namely intrusive fantasies, immersive fantasies, portal fantasies, and liminal fantasies. The first type “is set in a world (often our own) into which the fantastic intrudes, causing chaos and confusion. Neither protagonist nor reader is familiar with the fantastic intrusion, and the story is a process of coming to terms with it” (Ekman 7). This type of fantasy is opposed to that of the immersive fantasy, in which the protagonist naturally inhabits the fantastic world and the reader needs to unravel the rules of this world on their own. Contrarily, portal fantasies introduce the readers to the secondary world alongside the protagonist. Here, the point of origin is either a version of the primary world, or “a place in the fantasy world that, like the reader’s world, is ‘small, safe, and understood’ (such as the noneventful, comprehensible Shire)” (Ekman 7). The last category, liminal fantasy, describes stories set in the primary world in which fantastic elements are embedded. However, unlike immersive fantasies in which the protagonists take these for granted, liminal fantasies are characterized by the characters’ reaction to the fantastic elements as unusual and extraordinary. A famous example for this type of fantasy literature would be Kafka’s

Metamorphosis (1915) where the protagonist feels the same uneasiness about his sudden and unexpected transformation into a bug as the reader.

Apart from Mendlesohn there are also other critics who use the notion of setting and landscape in fantasy literature as a basis of categorizations. For instance, there is a common distinction in fantasy literature research between high and low fantasy. High fantasy is regarded as a fantasy story that is mainly set in a secondary world. Angelskår notes that in this case “At least some of these elements are treated as commonplace or natural” (32). On the other hand, low fantasy refers to fantasy stories mainly set in the primary world, such as intrusive or liminal fantasies. However, the distinction between high and low fantasy does not always provide an adequate theoretic frame for the categorization of fantasy texts. For instance, a common storyline found in fantasy literature that cannot be explained by the distinction between high and low Fantasy is that of the hero entering a strange and distant secondary world. The most notable example for this idea would be Lewis’ aforementioned *Narnia* series, in which the children leave the primary, ordinary world and literally enter the secondary, fantastic world through a wardrobe. It could also be claimed that Harry Potter enters a kind of secondary world by entering the world of wizardry that is invisible to non-magical people. These cases can only be found in a mix of high and low fantasy, in which the story is set in both the primary as well as the secondary world. Applying Mendlesohn’s typology, these would be called portal fantasies.

It should be emphasized that the terms high and low do not refer to the quality of the work in any way. However, the division between high and low Fantasy has led to some tensions among critics. Angelskår points out that there are some researchers who try to limit the fantasy genre to high Fantasy only. Among these critics are J.R.R. Tolkien, Brian Atteberry, and Ann Swinfen. On the other hand, a number of critics only discuss texts classified as low fantasy. Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, or Eric S. Rabkin are proponents of this latter view on fantasy literature. Interestingly, these critics tend to discuss fantasy literature in terms of psychoanalysis, and rather situate fantasy “within or on the fringes of the literary canon” (Angelskår 34). These observations could also be held accountable for some of the academic disagreements on the terms fantasy and fantasy literature.

1.3.3. Characters

It is interesting that compared to fantastic settings there seems to be a general agreement on what kind of characters are typical of fantasy literature. Mendlesohn and James write about monsters, sorcerers, and dragons (7), Tolkien mentions elves, dwarfs, and witches (14), and Ekman even names his book on fantastic settings *Here Be Dragons* (2013). Especially the last example shows how much fantastic stories are associated with specific characters and creatures. Considering the examples given, it seems obvious that the characters typical of fantasy literature should be summarized as fantastic beings. They are then defined as inherently fantastic, meaning they cannot be found in the primary world outside of fantasy literature, and, most notably, are not human. There might have been historic periods where women were called witches, and even nowadays strange animals or appalling persons might easily be described as monsters. However, what makes the characters and creatures unique to fantasy literature is that their otherness is natural and real in the fantastic setting.

Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" also considers the role of fantastic beings in fantasy literature. Explaining the charm of the fantastic to be found in fantasy stories, Tolkien writes about his wish as a child to learn about the realm of faërie. He "had no special 'wish to believe.' [He] wanted to know" (39). Hence, in his interest in fantasy stories he was guided by fantastic beings, such as dragons. "The dragon had the trade-mark of Faërie written plain upon him. In whatever world he had his being it was an Other-world" (Tolkien, "Fairy Stories" 40). Thus, Tolkien links his idea of a "real Other-world" to that of its inhabitants. Only in the Perilous Realm of Faërie it is possible to meet dragons as if they were real. Because they need to become real, in a sense, Tolkien also developed the idea of giving his characters origins by establishing his own fantastic history. In Middle-Earth, each of the characters and numerous races have a complex history of their own, set in this fantastic other-world. Additionally, he developed a number of languages and alphabets that provided an even deeper understanding of the characters and their world. After Tolkien's prime example, the idea of fictional histories in secondary worlds inspired other authors of fantasy literature as well. Recently published authors following his example are, for instance, George R.R. Martin or Christopher Paolini. Especially the genre's protagonists, or heroes, are often presented within their historical backgrounds, which adds a certain kind of depth to the character. In her discussion of Tolkien's character evolution, Hadimbu outlines how these historical accounts influence the behavior of Tolkien's characters as well as the readers in their perception of them. She concludes: "Once we have read these additions [...] the picture is complete"

(Hadimbu 171). It can, thereby, be assumed that readers appreciate some kind of justification for the characters' deeds and actions, especially when the story is set in an unknown world, to fully believe in them "as if they were real". Similarly, Prieto-Pablos writes,

[T]he reader has the impression that the story he is reading does not start on the first page but exists beyond the book and extends backwards to the past, our immediate future. The effects for the reader are both an expansion of his imagination (wondering what may not have been told by the author) and a strengthening of the suspension of disbelief, as the story in the book becomes an episode in a potentially larger narrative, something which might effectively be assimilated into man's real, foreseeable history. (Prieto-Pablo 67)

Although he did not approve of the notion of "the suspension of disbelief", Tolkien's view was very similar. In "On Fairy Stories", he similarly notes, "the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter" (Tolkien, "Fairy Stories" 36).

1.3.4. Narrative techniques

Similar to themes, settings and characters, there are certain narrative modes and techniques that are often found in fantasy literature. A first distinction can be made between stories that are plot-driven, and those that are character-driven. As Mandala outlines, fantasy stories are typically thought to be plot-driven as opposed to character-driven (120). This means that instead of the plot revealing the characters' story, the characters are mainly there to further the plot. For instance, Brooke-Rose remarks that in *The Lord of the Rings* the two hobbits' Merry's and Pippin's only role is to "split the Company, *so that* separate adventures can be followed" (237). Similarly, Boromir's function is "to introduce dissension in the Company [...], *so that* it can split" (Brooke-Rose 237, her emphasis).

These splits of the Company in *The Lord of the Rings* may lead to the conclusion that the narrator in fantasy literature is often omniscient. Since the narrative follows all stories relevant to the plot, the reader often knows more than the characters. An excellent example for this would be the narrator's remark in *The Hobbit* when Bilbo finds the Ring, saying, "[i]t was a turning point in his career, but he did not know it" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 65). As the narrator is omniscient, they also understand how much, or how little information the reader already has. For example, introducing the hobbit Bilbo, the narrator adds: "[W]hat is a hobbit? I

suppose Hobbits need some description nowadays” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 4). Not only is the story narrated through a first-person viewpoint here, but the narrator also frequently addresses the reader directly, such as, “[n]ow you know enough to go on with” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 4), after his account on hobbits is finished. Although the narrator often is omniscient, this close connection between the narrator and the reader is still unusual in fantasy literature. Yet, it is sometimes found in fantasy directed at a children or young adult audience. Aside from Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, Martin Zusak’s *The Book Thief* (2005) gives an excellent example for this kind of relation. Especially since the narrator is Death, who is not only omniscient but also acts within the story, this piece of literature could be classified as a liminal fantasy in which the narrator breaks the fourth wall. Often, however, the narrative voice is restricted to a third-person limited viewpoint. This means that the reader knows just as much as the protagonists and ventures forward alongside their heroes into the literary world. Examples for this are numerous, such as the *Harry Potter* series, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, or most fairy tales.

Many pieces of fantasy literature are characterized by a special use of language. Especially pieces of heroic or epic fantasy often employ archaic language. This may hint at the fact that many of these literary works are directly influenced by medieval romances and chivalric tales, in both content and language. Again, Tolkien provides convincing evidence for this assumption. In his discussion on Tolkien’s use of words in *The Hobbit*, Fisher establishes a close link between seemingly invented words and Old English terms. He quotes Shippey who states that “[m]ost of *The Hobbit* suggests strongly that Tolkien did not work from ideas, but from words, names, consistencies and contradictions in folk-tales” (Shippey, qtd. in J. Fisher 13). Hence, Tolkien’s personal interest in Old English and Norse mythic tales as well as his scholarly knowledge of medieval literature provided the grounds for his fantastic works. James remarks that one of the most important contributions “made by Tolkien to later twentieth-century fantasy was that the default cultural model for the fantasy world was the Middle Ages” (70). Thus, it comes as no surprise that Howey observes that especially in modern fantasy literature medievalism plays a major role. She writes, “the books represent the medieval [...] through narrative content and language choices (such as the register chosen for the narrator and for characters in dialogue)” (Howey 215). An example that clearly follows the example of literary medievalism set by Tolkien is George R.R. Martin’s series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011) which also features archaic language use. It is set in a medieval secondary world in which knights, kings, and queens fight for power and for the Iron Throne to rule the Seven Kingdoms. A strong allusion to medievalism can also be found in fantastic

stories about witchcraft and sorcery, such as *Harry Potter*. J.K. Rowling appropriates a number of intertextual references to medieval chivalric tales, such as “forests, feasts, confraternities, and tournaments” (Ward 265). Other intertextual relations include the legend of the Philosopher’s Stone, or the Arthurian tale. This interweaving of medieval legends and earlier pieces of literature into modern fantasy literature may lead to a special fascination with the genre. Radulescu writes,

From the perspective of a modern audience, who may well be completely unfamiliar with any aspects of medieval storytelling or indeed anything premodern, the retelling opens a door into the unknown, luring the reader into a world that can be revealed by further reading. The retelling remains, by definition, a portal to that other world of the original, mediating, ever so partially, the arcane words and significance of the story once told centuries ago. (Radulescu 246)

Hence, the use of archaic language and medieval motifs can be seen as alluring to a fantasy readership. Although the origins of the fantasy texts may be unknown, the linguistic and narrative techniques used establish a link between the secondary and the primary world that can brighten the reading experience even more. It seems, then, as if fantasy texts would not only present a link to fantastic worlds but also to an unfamiliar and mysterious past to which there would be no entrance otherwise. Or, as Gilman puts it, “[t]he past bleeds through the distemper. But even in a fantastic setting that is like the here and now there is a spring of strangeness – an elsewhere or an otherwise – beneath the fields (or city streets) we know, upwelling. The language of the past is one such spring, a medium of dissolution and of transport” (Gilman 137).

The next chapter of this thesis will discuss how the fantastic texts in which this language is used represent heroism. Since writers of fantasy literature are often influenced by earlier representations of heroes, the concept of heroism will be studied with regards to the historical context of fantasy. Hence, ancient and medieval precursors of modern fantastic literature are compared to modern examples of the genre with a focus on the protagonists’ heroic profiles. In that way, a definition of heroism in fantasy literature shall be developed.

2. Heroism in Fantasy Literature

One of the major concepts dealt with in fantasy literature is heroism. As Clute and Grant state, heroes and heroines “are fairly essential to high fantasy and heroic fantasy” (464).⁵ Since they

⁵ To simplify matters, the term “hero” will refer to both male hero and female heroine hereafter if not clearly stated otherwise.

are “[t]he most common protagonists of fantasy” (Clute and Grant 464) and the term hero is also considered a synonym for “the principal character in a literary or dramatic work” (merriam-webster.com), it could be claimed that all pieces of fantasy literature feature at least one hero. Clute and Grant explain, “[t]hey may be, singly or severally, avatars of gods, brave little tailors, changelings, childe figures, duos, hidden monarchs, knights of the doleful countenance, persons who learn better, temporal adventuresses or ugly ducklings” (464). Interestingly, as shown here, the term hero does not only refer to knights or godlike figures. A hero in a piece of fantasy literature can just as well be of average or even inferior than average appearance or character. Hence, the term’s definition cannot rely on outer appearance or on a specific role alone. A definition of a hero is then usually also concerned with the character’s nature. Flescher’s definition of heroes as “moral agents who characteristically go beyond the call of duty in contexts in which terror, fear, or the drive for self-preservation would prevent most people from doing so” (109) can be seen as an example for that. Similarly, Jayawickreme and Di Stefano define heroism as “an individual’s commitment to a noble purpose, usually aimed at furthering the welfare of others, and involving the willingness to accept the consequences of achieving that purpose” (165). These examples show that heroes in the primary world are usually defined by the attempt to overcome their survival instinct in order to follow and go above “the call of duty”. However, as this thesis concerns heroism in fantastic secondary worlds, the following passage will examine the concept with regards to literary representations.

In his seminal book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* which was first published in 1949, Joseph Campbell discusses the idea of heroism by comparing different myths and their portrayals of heroism. He finds that “[t]he hero [...] is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms” (Campbell 19). This explanation differs from the ones already mentioned insofar as the hero is only legitimately called a hero after the heroic deed has been attempted. A simple commitment to heroism is not enough for Campbell to define a hero. Yet, the emphasis is once more placed on the inner “limitations” the hero has to overcome. Mentioning “local historical limitations”, Campbell also considers the hero in their own context. It may be concluded that different cultures or historical eras call for different heroes. A heroic deed of three hundred years ago may not be regarded as such today, while Middle Eastern cultures may call for a different kind of hero than those in Southeast Asia. Ultimately, this must be the reason why writers of fantasy literature have always depicted different kinds of heroism. However, at the core of all kinds of heroism lies the struggle to overcome inner

fears and barriers. Campbell writes about heroism in myth that “[t]he passage of the mythological hero may be overground, incidentally; fundamentally it is inward - into depths where obscure resistances are overcome” (29). This theory could be transferred to modern fantasy literature and would still hold true. Again, this hints at the aforementioned allusion to the *Bildungsroman* genre where the hero’s journey is essentially a psychological one. With regards to Campbell’s restrictions to the genre of myth which are regarded as classical heroic narratives here, it should be noted that the heroic profile of protagonists in modern fantasy literature may not necessarily coincide with Campbell’s concept. However, taking into consideration that today’s fantasy literature originates in mythical tales, these restrictions do not pose any major drawbacks to the current discussion of heroism in fantasy literature. In fact, the following parts of this thesis will show how Campbell’s theory of heroism as characterized by an overcoming of inner barriers and the actual performance of heroic deeds also hold true in modern fantasy literature.

Before the concepts of heroism in fantasy literature are examined in more detail, it needs to be addressed whether or not heroes depicted in fantastic texts follow the rules of heroism of the primary world or are rather pieces of pure imagination. With regards to the discussion in previous chapters, the distinction between real and unreal as well as the one between imagination and fantasy needs to be taken into consideration to find an answer to that question. As quoted above, Tolkien regards imagination as “images of things that are not only ‘not actually present,’ but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all, or are generally believed not to be found there” (16). Further, he finds that imagination is realized through the artistic act of fantasy (Kelly 198). It can be concluded that heroes found in fantasy stories are not to be found in the primary world as they are only imagined. However, as these imagined heroes are realized through the power of fantasy, they become real in a sense in that the readers believe in them “as if they were real”. As a result, the question whether or not the depicted heroes are real should be answered with yes. While they are indeed pieces of pure imagination, it can be argued that the heroes are real from the moment they become a part of a fantastic secondary world.

Although all literary heroes are real in the secondary world, not all of them appear to be realistic in terms of the primary world’s reality. Yet, some critics emphasize the idea that readers still need to recognize some traces of their own reality in the characters. One of those critics is Mandala who explains that “[i]n alternative world fiction, character is especially important, as readers are more likely to ‘remain’ in the alternative world, as it were, if they

find these characters with which they can identify” (119). This idea relates to Tolkien’s theory of recognizable traces of reality in the unreal which was discussed above. One of the many instances in which this theory can be applied is found in the protagonists’ profile, considering that protagonists of fantasy literature are often, but not always, human beings. It is, of course, easier for the reader to identify with a character that is generally similar in appearance or behavior, such as a human, than it is with a flying and fire-spitting dragon. Dragons, elves, or other fantastic beings are often side characters, used to move forward the plot. A wizard may seem fantastic at first, but the appearance and general behavior as such is that of a human. Similarly, hobbits might not be found in the primary world, but their jovial and amicable characters as well as their behavior typically resemble those of humans. It is only small deviations, such as special fantastic skills, different historical developments of the species, or exceptional bravery which distinguish the hero from the reader. Besides humans and humanlike characters, talking animals are also often featured in fantasy literature as protagonists. A popular example for this is Peter S. Beagle’s fantasy novel *The Last Unicorn* (1968) which tells the story of a talking unicorn. Similarly, the protagonist of 16th century fairy tale *Puss in Boots* is a cat that not only talks, but also dresses like a human. Hence, even if the protagonists are not of human form, their personalities and characters often still resemble humans and make it arguably easy for the readers to identify with seemingly unrealistic heroes. Consequently, I argue that the traces of reality perceivable in fantasy literature extend to the depiction of heroes as readers would otherwise struggle to identify with them.

In this last chapter it was shown that although different fantasy heroes may possess different character traits, they are all equal representations of the concept of heroism. This illustrates that fantasy stories do not resemble one specific model of reality, and neither do heroes presented within these texts. The range of possibilities in heroes’ representations will now be demonstrated by a comparison of different examples of literary heroes.

2.1. Characteristics of Heroes in Fantasy Literature

As the brief survey of the historical development of fantasy literature has shown, representations of heroic characters as well as of heroic qualities can be traced back to some of the earliest literary writings. Pringle emphasizes that the emergence of early fantasy literature was mainly based on stories about gods, demi-gods, or human heroes, starting in

Greek antiquity (8). Consequently, ideas and concepts found in today's Western literature mainly originated in works from classic antiquity, including the concept of heroism. This means that heroes of modern fantasy share a common origin with heroes of earlier literary eras.

The next chapters will present a typology of fantastic heroes and discuss their respective characteristics. In my understanding, four different types of heroes are relevant here, i.e. classical, Germanic, chivalric, and modern heroes. Additionally, the idea of anti-heroism will be discussed as it is considered crucial to the development of modern heroism. In this discussion, my understanding of heroism relies on Campbell's notion of "[t]he hero [as] the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations" (19), as well as on Jayawickreme's and Di Stefano's definition of heroism based on the individual's acceptance of a task that may endanger them while serving a greater purpose (165). The importance of the hero's overcoming inner barriers is emphasized here as well as the exceptionality of doing so. Anti-heroism, on the other hand, is defined as a complete opposite of this kind of heroism. A lack of heroic characteristics as well as the refusal to commit to the heroic task or failure to complete the mission are defining characteristics of anti-heroes and will be also discussed.

It will be shown that although concepts of heroism represented in modern fantasy are not fully consistent with earlier concepts, classical heroes share a number of similarities with their modern counterparts. The concept of the hero can then be defined as ambivalent, as it has been and still is being applied to seemingly opposed characters.

2.1.1. Classical Heroism

The hero of classical antiquity was foremost found in heroic epics. Representations of heroes in these extensive poems were based on the myth of the Ages of the world, which were ranked gold, silver, bronze, and iron. As Curtius explains, in between the Bronze and the Iron Age the Heroic Age was inserted in which "god-like hero-men, who were called demigods", reigned and lived. This myth developed into a cult of heroes who bravely fell in battle and whose tales were then brought to paper (or rather parchment) in the form of epics (Curtius 169). Hence, death was closely linked with the concept of the ancient hero. Jones explains that "[t]he first heroes of Greek literature are those who died on the battlefield of Troy [...] As Greek 'colonies' [...] began to take root far from the homeland from the eighth century on,

fighting and death became part of the struggle to establish a firm foothold on foreign soil” (22). As a result, stories about warfare were naturally believed to be the realm of heroes. The concept of heroism and warlike qualities, such as strength or bravery, were, therefore, closely linked. Additionally, since the earliest representations of heroes were demi-gods, they were naturally superior to common men and women. King states, “[t]he human heroes of epic songs were taller, stronger, braver, handsomer, and occasionally smarter than contemporary men and women because they were more closely related to the gods via mothers or grandmothers (more rarely, fathers) who had been the objects of divine lust” (44-45). Consequently, heroism was limited to demi-gods who were of noble birth. As Curtius outlines, nobility was one of the most crucial qualities defining a hero. He writes, “[t]he idea of the hero is connected with the basic value of nobility. The hero is the ideal personal type whose being is centered upon nobility and its realization [...] and whose basic virtue is natural nobility in body and soul” (Curtius 167). This notion of nobility is often extended to the hero’s task. Taking into consideration Jayawickreme’s and Di Stefano’s earlier quoted definition of heroism, i.e. “an individual’s commitment to a noble purpose, usually aimed at furthering the welfare of others, and involving the willingness to accept the consequences of achieving that purpose” (165), it can be seen that the true hero only commits to a purpose that is characterized by this quality, too.

Two typical examples of heroes of the classical antiquity are Achilles and Odysseus who demonstrate that the classical concept of heroism allows for a certain degree of deviation from the ideal with regards to personality. Yet, they both embody defining characteristics of classical heroism. Their story is told in Homer’s two epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which were supposedly written in the 8th century BC. During the Trojan War, the warrior and demi-god Achilles angrily refuses to engage in combat because his King Agamemnon has seized a captured woman from him. However, when his friend and companion Patroclus is killed, Achilles seeks revenge and kills Hector of Troy. Later, he is injured from ambush by the Trojan Prince Paris at his heel, the only vulnerable spot on his body, and subsequently dies. The warrior Achilles remains undefeated on the battlefield and dies a heroic death. As Curtius remarks, Achilles’ descent from gods as well as his flawed character makes him a true tragic hero. “Achilles becomes an epic hero and a tragic victim not through the decree of fate alone but also through his own uncontrolled emotions” (171). Achilles is then defined as a kind of hero who is “not extra-ordinary in virtue and righteousness and yet does not fall into bad fortune because of evil and wickedness but because of some hamartia of a kind found in men of high reputation and good fortune” (Aristotle, qtd. in Adade-Yeboah et al. 10). *Hamartia* is

Greek for “erring” or “going wrong”. The tragic hero marked by this *hamartia* is commonly found in classical antiquity and commits a wrong and impulsive act which seals his fate. However, it seems important to note that “*hamartia* is of action and not of character” (Adade-Yeboah et al. 11). The tragic hero is defined by an already doomed fate, so that the flawed action cannot be averted and only initiates his fall. Consequently, Achilles can be characterized as a strong warrior who lacks the caution of a true leader which ultimately results in the *hamartia*. Contrastingly, Odysseus, King of Ithaca and distant descendant of Zeus and Hermes, unites both courage and a leader’s wisdom. He stops Achilles from a badly planned military attack, persuades Agamemnon to not stop fighting the war, and fights well on the battlefield. After the events recounted in the *Iliad* are over, Odysseus intends to return home to his wife and son. However, he has to face storms, beasts, and other creatures, such as a Cyclops, a witch, and Sirens. At the end of the *Odyssey* the journey has taken ten years, during which he has to prove his strength and wit. Curtius writes, “[t]he hero is distinguished by a superabundance of intellectual will and by its concentration against the instincts. It is this which constitutes his greatness of character. The specific virtue of the hero is self-control” (167). Self-control is embodied by Odysseus who never surrenders until he is home with his family which clearly demonstrates his willpower. Although he could easily eat the lotus fruit offered by the *lotophagi*, resulting in forgetting his home and family, or stay with the witch Circe where he feasts all day long, Odysseus always ventures to return home to his wife and son who are eagerly awaiting his arrival. His commitment to the promised return as well as the strength and intelligence demonstrated on the journey, make him a classical hero. Achilles, on the other hand, seeks revenge and lacks discipline. However, as was described above, the ideal hero of classical antiquity is mainly characterized by his warlike qualities of strength and bravery. Self-control is therefore not a required quality, and wisdom is only necessary with regards to the hero’s leadership on the battlefield. Both Achilles and Odysseus are fearless warriors and can therefore be seen as ideal classic heroes.

A similar kind of hero, albeit from a different literary era, is Beowulf, protagonist of the iconic poem of the same name. It was written by an unknown English poet sometime between the early 8th and the early 11th century and tells the fictional story of Scandinavian hero Beowulf who slays the dragon Grendel. As Beowulf displays Grendel’s torn off arm as a sign of victory, Grendel’s mother seeks revenge and is also slain by Beowulf. Years later, Beowulf, now king of his people, faces another dragon threatening his kingdom. Beowulf can ultimately kill it with the help of his relative Wiglaf, but is fatally wounded and dies. As Gwara illustrates, Beowulf represents the Germanic heroic ideal which is characterized by an

ambivalent personality: “*always* glorious, fearless, and solitary on the one hand; *potentially* spiteful, vain, barbaric, even murderous, on the other” (22). This ambivalence can be understood when taking the historical context into consideration.

As Sobchack explains, the story of *Beowulf* is based on historical events from early medieval Scandinavia at a time when Christianity was not yet established. Consequently, the society as well as its concept of heroism depicted in the poem resemble the Scandinavian pagan warrior society in which only man’s actions during life were believed to guarantee an afterlife among the gods. Hence, Sobchack emphasizes that the Scandinavian society represented in *Beowulf* “exemplified a firm trust in Fate (*wyrd*), a strict code of honor, loyalty, and oath-keeping, the importance of doing one’s duty, and the bone-deep necessity of winning eternal fame” (13). Adhering to these values was believed to be the only way to be chosen by the gods. However, Sobchack further points out that “[t]he afterlife they sought could only be gained by those who died bravely, weapon in hand, chosen by Odin as one of his beloved thanes and given a seat at his roisterous mead-bench in Valhalla” (14). Similar to the concept in classical antiquity, heroism in *Beowulf*’s world is, subsequently, strongly linked with the idea of death on the battlefield as well as with inner strength demonstrated when faced with evil and danger. Sobchack states that the society represented in the poem held the strong belief “that all things in their world, even monstrous things, could be mastered by a man’s own strength and willing heart. A man’s prowess would gain him much sought-after and highly prized fame and glory on this earth, regardless of whether or not he was taken up into Odin’s realm” (16). With that in mind, it can be argued that *Beowulf*’s loyalty to the king and commitment to slaying the dragons despite the life-threatening circumstances renders him a true hero. Yet, only because he dies a brave and, therefore, heroic death *Beowulf* is allowed to sit next to the gods in Valhalla. Hence, Gwara’s definition of the ideal Germanic hero represented by *Beowulf* as “*always* glorious, fearless, and solitary on the one hand; *potentially* spiteful, vain, barbaric, even murderous, on the other” (22) obviously originates from this juxtaposition. While the hero strives for fame during life to receive the possibility of an afterlife, he faces the inevitability of death in doing so. Death is inevitable for the Germanic hero because he only becomes a true hero by dying bravely. This means that he has to prove his courage knowing that his fate is to die. In Old English, this fate is also known as *wyrd* and naturally plays an important role in tales of Germanic heroes.

Shippey notes that the term *wyrd*, deriving from the Old English (*ge*)*lingan*, may not only be translated as “fate”, but also as “luck”, (145). This is defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as

“[s]uccess or failure apparently brought by chance rather than through one’s own actions”, and “[c]hance [is] considered as a force that causes good or bad things to happen” (Oxforddictionaries.com). Hence, the Germanic hero has to trust his luck, or fate, and, therefore, accepts his pending death. Fisher concludes, “[s]ince it is the fate of the noble warrior to await death, what can be rescued from life is the measure of his fame” (P. Fisher 173). Considering the word “noble” here, it may be interesting to note that the Germanic hero, unlike the hero of classical antiquity, is not thought to be of divine descent, but to be merely “extraordinarily gifted” (P. Fisher 172), and potentially of noble descent (Gwara 18). Interestingly, the hero can still expect some kind of divine or unearthly intervention. For instance, when Beowulf faces Grendel’s mother he finds an ancient sword forged by giants which helps him win the fight. It is believed that he would have lost his life without the sword, which is why some argue that fortune or *wyrd* favored Beowulf and led him to the sword (P. Fisher 177; Gwara 29).

As Smee notes, “[t]he gift of the sword is a symbol of initiation into adult masculinity” (156), and this symbol is also of major importance in the life of another hero to be discussed here. The legend of King Arthur is somewhat unique in that researchers still struggle to decide whether it tells about the life of a historical or rather a mythological figure. Although there have been allusions in Celtic tales to a, supposedly historical figure called Arthur since the early 7th century, the persona known as King Arthur today mainly originates from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s 12th century work *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which was later adapted and extended by other medieval writers (see Green 7-44). The Arthurian legend tells the story of young Arthur who is conceived out of wedlock as the son of Britain’s King Uther Pendragon. Upon Uther’s death, Arthur pulls the sword Caledfwlch from a stone and through this is revealed to be the true heir to the crown. He then expands the kingdom greatly, and ultimately attempts to conquer Rome. At that point Arthur learns that his nephew Mordred has taken possession of Arthur’s wife and has ascended to the throne. He returns to Britain and kills his nephew. Yet, Arthur is fatally wounded and leaves for the Isle of Avalon to recover where he never returns from. Similar to the discussion of *Beowulf*, the historical context of the Arthurian legend needs to be considered in order to define the represented concept of heroism.

At the time of origin of Geoffrey’s work, various conflicts between England and other peoples and countries had led to major political and social changes throughout Britain. Consequently, the Arthurian tale supported the emergence of an English identity, representing an ideal British hero who is characterized by his chivalrous behavior. Mainer remarks, “[i]n the

historical romances, the idiosyncratic representation of knighthood, chivalry and *cortesía* is conditioned by their national and nationalistic subject matter” (193), indicating the strong connection between the time of publication and historical context of the tale. Interestingly, Oergel points out that the original tales of Arthur were Celtic and, therefore, states that “[t]he effectiveness of the integration of the ‘Celtic’ Arthur into an English identity rests on the element of the chivalric as an integral part of the Northern and, by implication, the English identity” (Oergel 200). He further adds, “[t]he identification of the Arthur-material as the primary matter of chivalry has already emerged” (Oergel 200). Hence, the Arthurian tales are seen as the origins of chivalric romance, with Arthur representing the ideal chivalric hero.

In accordance with other kinds of heroes discussed above, this ideal medieval hero of chivalry is characterized by superior combat skills and leadership. Hence, it comes as no surprise that Oergel views medieval knights in the same tradition as Greek heroes when he mentions that brave knights of chivalric romances were believed to be born to fairies, similar to heroes of the classical antiquity being born to gods and goddesses (Oergel 101). Regarding this emphasis on bravery and success on the battlefield, Green observes that Arthur is depicted as “the ‘mighty defender’ of Britain from supernatural threats [...] a ‘Brittonic superhero’ and paragon of military valour” (93). He further serves as “the ultimate standard of comparison” (Green 79) by which every other warrior is assessed. Additionally to prowess proven in combat, Starn cites the qualities of “loyalty, largesse, [and] *courtoisie*” (75) as distinctive characteristics of a true chivalric hero. In order to fully possess these qualities the hero has to progress “from youth into maturity through a series of tests” (Mainer 103). The progression is usually only finished at the end of the tale, and is characterized by both a literal as well as a spiritual journey. The importance of these characteristics in chivalric heroism is ultimately rooted in the prominence of Christianity in medieval lives. As Arthur represents the ideal medieval leader, he therefore also represents Christian values. Subsequently, Mainer explains: “Only through being a good Christian can someone become a good monarch” (119). Eventually he concludes, that the “intimate connection between the heroes’ spiritual journey and political issues regarding kingship and government” (Mainer 155) is distinctive of chivalric literature.

In conclusion, a classical definition of heroism unites a number of attributes, depending on where and when the heroic narrative was created. The Greek hero descends from gods and possesses the warlike qualities of strength, bravery and leadership. It was demonstrated that later concepts of heroism as developed in Germanic epics and chivalric romances are strongly

based on this model. These concepts are developed in contexts of battles and war, and highlight a special bond of heroes and divine beings, too. However, Germanic heroes are additionally characterized by the need to seek fame and to trust in their *wyrd*, while medieval heroes of chivalry further demonstrate Christian values such as gallantry and honor. Although all three types follow a classical concept of heroism, this last part demonstrated that heroism is ambivalent in essence. The term does not refer to a single set of qualities found within a person but is highly influenced by historical and cultural expectations and, accordingly, represents a variety of attributes. Some of these attributes even contradict each other, such as ferocity, as found within the Germanic hero, and mercy, as would be expected by a Christian chivalric hero. Nevertheless, both representations of heroes are ultimately based on an ancient Greek definition of heroism and the heroes act accordingly.

The following part concerns heroes as depicted in modern fantasy literature. Although fantastic stories of modern heroes often climax in the battle between good and evil, modern heroic features, such as the ordinary background of the hero coupled with inner strength, do not necessarily relate to war and clearly deviate from the classical concept of heroism. Yet, it will be shown that traces of classical heroism are still to be found in the modern concept of fantasy heroes.

2.1.2. Modern Heroism

When comparing classical heroes found in myths and legends to heroes of modern fantasies or fantastic tales, a number of differences can be found. First and foremost, heroes in modern fantasy literature are not necessarily of divine, or even noble, descent. As was discussed above, heroes of classical antiquity as well as later representations of Germanic or chivalric heroes, were usually born to gods or goddesses, or were of royal blood. Contrarily, heroes depicted in recent fantasy literature are not necessarily special with regards to their descent. For instance, Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013) features a protagonist from a normal family returning to his childhood hometown. Similarly, the heroine in L. Frank Baum's famous *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), Dorothy Gale, is an orphan being raised on a farm in rural Kansas. Yet, it might be argued that questions of descent, although not necessarily related to divinity or nobility, sometimes play a role in modern fantasy with regards to the often depicted character's struggle for identity. For example, in Kerstin Gier's *Ruby Red* trilogy (2009-2010), the female protagonist has to accept her family's magic

heritage, while the character of Jon Snow in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is unknowingly the illegitimate heir to one of the royal families.

Related to the question of descent is that of the gender, ethnic background, or sexual identity of modern protagonists. Although there were a number of literary heroines in classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, such as Medea, Iphigenia, or Criseyde, the introduction of female heroes was not common in fantasy literature. One of the main reasons for this was that heroes were always presented as a kind of ideal. Yet, the ideal woman was believed to be soft, tender, and caring for as well as dependent on a man. As heroism was mainly characterized by qualities opposed to these assumed feminine qualities, such as courage, strength, or wisdom, heroines were, consequently, less usual in literature than heroes. The woman represented the mother, wife, and goddess, but never the savior, warrior, or protector. Discussing the seeming contradiction in female heroes, Schaafsma notes that a heroine "may also be alienated from her feminine aspect" (52), while Schubart considers "the ambivalence of a female hero, who incorporates apparently contradictory traits such as being a sexualized spectacle and an able and aggressive hero" (Schubart 113). This shows that in order to create plausible heroines, authors had to emphasize the masculine qualities of their heroines and abandon overtly feminine attitudes. Considering Schubart remarks, "where he will gain a kingdom, she, instead, will gain a husband" (53), these assumed masculine and feminine qualities evidently create different literary expectations of male and female heroes in fantasy literature. Nevertheless, both male and female heroes are depicted in contemporary fantastic texts. As already discussed above, reader identification with characters plays a major role in the literature's perception and allows the reader to more readily "'remain' in the alternative world" (Mandala 119). This realization may have led to a generally more diverse depiction of heroes in modern fantasy as the readership of fantasy literature has been constantly becoming more diverse as well (McGarry and Ravipinto 25).

One of the most iconic female heroines of contemporary fantasy literature is Daenerys Targaryen, one of the protagonists in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. She is described as "stunningly beautiful" (Schubart 110), thus adhering to the stereotypical representation of women, but at the same time she is cruel, strong, and fearless. At the beginning of the first book she is depicted as a typical female character, the victim, but soon learns how to turn her compassion into indifference, and her humility into pride. Daenerys, princess of the Targaryen, is faced with a difficult task at the beginning of her tale, as she is married away by her brother to seventeen year older Drogo, King of the Dothraki people, at

the age of thirteen. She is raped by her husband, as is common in the Dothraki culture, but claims agency when she learns how to mount him. “Agency is not given to the hero; it must be earned” (Schubart 116), and Daenerys uses her sexuality in order to do so. When her brother visits her he is appalled by her tribal looks, and shames and beats her. The next time he threatens her and Daenerys’ unborn child, Drogo, who has since accepted Daenerys as an equal, has him killed. After mastering her brother and her husband, Daenerys faces a trial that ultimately makes her a hero. When Daenerys asks Drogo to go to war to claim the Iron Throne for her, he is wounded and tended to by an old witch of one of the defeated villages. As an act of revenge the witch claims Daenerys’ unborn child as a sacrifice and sends Drogo back braindead. As a result, the Dothraki leave Daenerys, and she burns Drogo, the witch and herself, since she has nothing to lose. However, her ancestry reveals her to be immune to fire and she returns from it unharmed at the side of three dragons, hatched from their eggs that Daenerys carried with her. This last part, during which Daenerys has to face the witch, can be seen as a trial. Schubart comments: “Where test and task teach Daenerys the pride of a Queen, the trial teaches her to think like one” (119). She acquires modern heroic qualities by escaping from the stereotypical female position ascribed to her. Additionally, the hatching of the dragons subvert the stereotypically male heroic act of slaying a dragon to save a princess. Daenerys herself is the princess who does not slay but rather create the dragons. Schubart concludes that Daenerys becomes a modern hero because “[s]he combines emotions and elements that are stereotypically gendered male and female (male pride, a male dragonslayer, a damsel in distress), and claims agency for herself and others” (122).

As the example of Daenerys Targaryen demonstrates, modern heroism represents more diverse kinds of heroes than classical heroism. Daenerys shows how women can become just as heroic as men in modern fantasy. However, she is still situated in the classical tradition in that her heroic qualities are mainly defined by warlike standards taken from earlier literary eras. Modern heroes can also be defined by non-classical qualities. For instance, Lotze writes about modern heroes:

They go about their lives and do what needs to be done. They do the right thing when others do the easy thing or the thing that will bring immediate gratification. [...] A hero is unselfish and sharing, someone who makes information available to others, knowing that the information will grow as others use it and be of even more value to the hero. (Lotze 30)

Although clearly defined by a commitment to “do[ing] the right thing”, a modern hero’s unselfishness is an obvious deviation from the classical model. As mentioned above, classical heroes primarily strive for fame and are not necessarily interested in unselfishly serving

others. However, since modern literary heroes developed from representations of heroes of earlier times, there are also certain similarities between them. For example, heroes still set out on a journey which Campbell characterizes by the stages of “separation – initiation – return” (30).⁶ This journey is initiated by the so-called call to adventure. As Lotze puts it, “[h]eroes are people who take that journey. They are people who, when presented the opportunity to transform, take up the challenge – answer the call to adventure with a ‘yes!’ – Either resounding and enthusiastic, or hesitating and reluctant” (26). And she further explains: “The hero can be every man and every woman. What makes the hero different is the call to adventure and the response that comes in stepping across the threshold of the known into the wilderness” (Lotze 31).

From the paragraph above it can be concluded that the modern hero is only distinct from other people in that he chooses to answer the call to adventure, whereas others would refrain from doing so. This call, however, does not need to be a literal “call”, nor is it necessarily made by a person. Campbell notes that a moment of crisis marks the call which “rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration [...] The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 51). It can be concluded that the call to adventure marks a critical moment in the modern hero’s life as he has to choose whether or not to answer it. Contrastingly, classical heroes await the call eagerly and answer it immediately. Moreover, the call to adventure normally comes as a moment of crisis itself in which the modern hero’s life or world which was presented as average until this point of the story is suddenly interrupted.

This averageness is not limited to the modern hero’s life. It often further extends to his character, as is shown in Lotze’s earlier quoted explanation of the hero as being “every man and every woman”. However, similar to classical heroes, modern heroes may possess special skills, such as powerful minds, power over the elements, or a special bond with animals and other creatures. Often, modern heroes only discover these fantastic skills and acquire mastery over them while on their journey, while classical heroes have immediate control over their special powers. Examples for these kinds of modern heroes are found in Christopher Paolini’s *Eragon* tetralogy (2002-2011) where the eponymous hero discovers his ability to communicate with dragons, or in *The Lovely Bones* (2002) by Alice Sebold, in which Susie

⁶ See chapter 2.2. for a further discussion of Campbell’s concept of the hero’s journey.

Salmon tells her own story and briefly enters another human's body although she is actually already dead and watches the unfolding events from heaven.

Although classical and modern concepts of heroism are therefore different in a number of ways, similarities, such as the acceptance of the call to adventure, the emphasis on committing to "do[ing] the right thing" or the possession and heroic usage of fantastic powers, are also noticeable. This shows that, although clearly different, the notion of modern heroism is still based on preceding concepts. A number of modern authors therefore consciously make use of this interrelation and choose to depict classical representations of heroism in their fantasy books. An early modern example for this is William Morris' hero Osberne Wulfgrimsson in the fantasy novel *The Sundering Flood* (1897) shares numerous characteristics with classical heroes. He obtains a magic sword, fights bravely against a cruel king, and returns home as a great warrior where he unites with his beloved one. Additionally to his bravery and strength, he cleverly uses his skills to negotiate peace and, thus, embodies the perfect romantic hero. However, Osberne can be seen as one of the first modern heroes. An indication for this argument is that Osberne is not of noble descent; quite the contrary, as he is an orphan working on a farm. He further is not innately wise, but rather has to learn and rise to the challenge. Smee emphasizes that Osberne's young age renders him quite unique a hero (92). At one point, he meets an evil dwarf in a cave and, due to his youth and innocence, almost does not recognize the danger he is in. However, this encounter depicts his childish innocence as well as his "innate physical prowess and bravery" (Smee 157), which can be seen as another hint at the interrelation of classical and modern models of heroism that Morris employs.

As shown in the previous example, modern heroes are often based on classical models and share a number of characteristics. Consequently, Prieto-Pablos finds that heroes in contemporary fantasy literature possess traits which can be found in heroes of both romance and tragedy. He explains that since heroes are usually depicted as some kind of savior, they embody the ideal hero of the romance. At the same time, modern heroes are often flawed, which resembles the concept of the tragic hero (Prieto-Pablos 66). Especially with regards to Prieto-Pablos' remarks about Paul, the hero of Frank Herbert's saga *Dune* (1965), as a kind of reluctant hero with great potential, his explanation seems worth exploring. He identifies Paul's tragic flaw as "a kind of nature that he does not fully assimilate and by forces that he can hardly control [...]" The attributes conferred on him by this other nature give him abilities superior to those of any other hero before him and make him virtually invincible" (68).

However, Prieto-Pablos adds that “these abilities, which would be definite weapons against enemies in other narratives, are here the real sources of the crises” (68). Ultimately, Paul has to acknowledge the fact that he is and can be more than he wants to be. Prieto-Pablos calls this inner conflict “the struggle between his dual self, or between nature and supernature” (69). Heroes of contemporary fantasy literature frequently have to endure this conflict. While classical heroes bravely accept their fate, modern heroes typically struggle with it. Besides Paul, other examples for this kind of modern hero struggling with their fate are Katniss Everdeen, hero of Suzanne Collin’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), or George Orwell’s hero Winston Smith, protagonist of the dystopian novel *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949). Both characters’ inner struggle to accept their fate is a central theme in the books.

This discussion of modern heroism has revealed that the concept is clearly distinct from a classical one. Meanwhile, the similarities between modern and classical heroes which were also discussed show how closely linked both concepts are. Modern heroism is evidently rooted in the classical concept, but incorporates clear deviations from this model. Most notably, heroes of modern fantasy literature are frequently depicted as anti-heroes who only turn into heroes while pursuing the quest. Thus, modern heroism in fantasy literature can be defined by both classical and antagonistic standards as a kind of heroism that highlights the protagonist’s reluctance and inner struggle to develop and ultimately to accept the heroic identity. Clear signs of anti-heroism, which shall be discussed in the following chapter, are therefore a crucial characteristic of modern heroism. Nevertheless, characteristics of classical heroism are also incorporated in the representation of the typical modern hero as he displays bravery, wisdom, and the ability to overcome inner barriers in the battle between good and evil. Consequently, the concept of modern heroism is defined by its inherent ambivalence, as it combines both classical and anti-heroic traits.

2.1.3. Anti-Heroism

The last chapters have shown how literary heroes are, and have been, commonly defined. Taha summarizes that there are “three central features: the positive dimension including the conceptions and values that the hero represents, either collective or individual; his ability to succeed in the mission which was either imposed on him or undertaken by himself; and the identification he is able to inspire in the reader” (ch. 1) Nevertheless, not all protagonists fit into the category of the perfect hero.

The notion of anti-heroism concerns this deviation from the general idea of heroism. Anti-heroes can be defined as potential heroic protagonists who are presented with the opportunity to act heroically but refrain from doing so for a number of reasons. For instance, fear, physical as well as psychological weakness, or lack of morals, mark a number of heroes at the beginning of their journey, as was shown in the last chapter. Therefore, the refusal to answer the call to adventure is also commonly found in anti-heroes. Stroda remarks that “[t]he invitation [i.e. the call to adventure] is usually followed by one or several refusals and, finally, agreement, yet it cannot be denied that some heroes seem to be dragged on this path against their will” (187). As was mentioned above, Lotze regards the hero’s choice to answer the call as one of the most significant heroic characteristics. Consequently, it can be argued that a protagonist lacking these and other qualities which are normally associated with heroes is rightfully called an anti-hero.

This kind of heroism is, quite logically, opposed to classical heroism, and can, therefore, mostly be found in modern literature. Although the anti-hero can nowadays often be found as the initial protagonist of a story, the figure was mainly introduced as an antagonistic counterpart to the central hero as a means of highlighting the heroic qualities of the protagonist. However, Taha maintains that the main distinction between a hero-protagonist and an anti-hero-protagonist is the latter’s failure “to accomplish the mission he undertakes, quite regardless of the type and essence of the mission” (ch. 1). Taha further lists a number of characteristics of anti-heroes, such as “introversion of the main character, individualization, alienation, hopelessness (i.e., anti-heroism), curtailment of the identifying marks of the major character” (Taha ch. 1). Another way of representing anti-heroism is described by Taha as “the apportioning of heroism among various characters” (ch. 1). He mentions that this “evinces the disintegration of the one and only, the omnipotent classical hero” (Taha ch. 1), which may refer to the close link of modern heroism and anti-heroism. Similarly, Yeomans holds that “[i]t is precisely the break from tradition that best characterizes the anti-hero” (Yeomans 37). Anti-heroic protagonists are therefore clearly opposed to a classical understanding of heroism, and can only be found in modern realizations of the fantasy genre.

While anti-heroes in novels outside the fantastic genre are often found to be less anti-heroic and rather anti-social, i.e. they behave badly, are unreliable narrators, or do not easily lead themselves for reader-identification, in fantasy literature their anti-heroic character is constructed in relation to classical heroic characteristics, such as the commitment to a noble purpose. The reason for this relation is explained by Clute and Grant who write that

“[b]ecause the taproot texts from which much fantasy derives deal either directly or at second hand with the heroic tradition, antiheroes in fantasy are very frequently defined as refusers of heroic commitment” (48). They furthermore emphasize the commonly found conversion from anti-hero to hero through learning and maturing along their way, as they write “many important stories turn on the protagonist’s recognition of his or her true self, which may well have been cloaked in antihero clothing” (Clute and Grant 48). Defining recognition as the moment in which “protagonists begin to understand what has been happening to them” (Clute and Grant 804), they stress the idea that a fantasy literature’s protagonist does not stay an anti-hero but will eventually recognize their heroic self. Considering that Taha defines the anti-hero as someone who does not accomplish the mission assigned to him, and that Clute and Grant believe the stage of recognition is a central theme in fantasy literature, it seems obvious that eventually most anti-heroes in fantasy literature transform into a hero. As they recognize their “true self”, they ultimately complete their quest and become the hero of the story. It should be noted, however, that there are texts of fantasy literature where the anti-hero does not change. For instance, Fitzsimmons discusses Tolkien’s tale *The Mariner’s Wife* (1980) that contradicts “[t]he majority of stories in Tolkien’s legendarium [which] offer dramatic examples of heroic behavior which can instruct the reader on how to conduct one’s life”, and in which by establishing a bad example “the reader is shown how not to behave through the dramatization of a failed marriage” (57). Here, the anti-hero stays one until the very end, and his recognition only takes place after the tragedy and defeat have happened.

The development from classical to modern heroism becomes apparent in the notion of anti-heroism. As anti-heroes refrain from committing to a heroic mission and are characterized by fear, weakness and a refusal to answer the call to adventure, they represent clear opposites from classical heroes. Therefore, anti-heroic protagonists are only found in modern fantasy literature. As Clute and Grant emphasize, these protagonists usually identify their true self at the point of recognition and assume a hero’s identity. The development from a classical to a modern notion of heroism is therefore highlighted by the introduction of initially anti-heroic protagonists who do not assume their heroic identity from the beginning of the story, but only in the course of their journey.

2.2. The Journey of the Hero

The last chapter has demonstrated that the heroes’ journeys are not always the same. Depending on their relation to anti-heroism, protagonists may struggle with the commitment

to the mission, may refuse to set out on their journey at all, or cause the mission's failure. Furthermore, some heroes may set out on a physical journey, while others also go on a psychological one. While the heroes' journeys may therefore be as different as the individual protagonists, some typical aspects have been defined by Campbell in his seminal text on representations of heroes in myths. Again, the above mentioned limitation of Campbell's concept to the genre of myths, i.e. classical fantasy texts, should not be of major concern here as modern fantasy heroes were revealed to be based on these models.

Campbell outlines the typical journey of a mythological, i.e. a classical, hero as follows:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark [...], or be slain by the opponent and descend in death [...]. Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid [...]. When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world [...], his recognition by the father-creator [...], his own divinization [...], or again – if the powers have remained unfriendly to him – his theft of the boon he came to gain [...]; intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being [...]. The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection [...]; if not, he flees and is pursued [...]. At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread [...]. The boon that he brings restores the world [...]. (Campbell 245-6)

As Campbell further explains, a messenger of some kind sometimes enters the hero's world and sends him on his journey. This heralding character can be encountered in classical and modern fantasy stories alike, such as Merlin in the tales of *King Arthur*, Hagrid in *Harry Potter*, or Dustfinger in Cornelia Funke's *Inkheart* trilogy (2003-2008). A classical call to adventure can also be encountered in *The Lord of the Rings* when the wizard Gandalf arrives in the Shire to inform Frodo of his imminent quest. Although Frodo is portrayed as an anti-hero as he refuses to accept the task at first, the example does not render Campbell's model inapplicable. On the contrary, Campbell emphasizes that this theoretical concept of the heroic journey is not realized in all narratives. He rather states that “[m]any tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle [...], others string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the *Odyssey*). Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many changes” (Campbell 246). These notes should be taken into consideration when applying the concept to any discussions of fantasy literature. Campbell's analysis of the classical hero's

journey can nevertheless be used as a point of comparison to modern examples of the fantasy literature genre.

This comparison is drawn by Clute and Grant who remark that the genre of fantasy literature “is meant to encompass many narratives which are *not* built around the central quest of a culture hero” (654). However, while the hero may not have to face a literal opponent or receive “magical aid”, he generally still follows a journey similar to the one described by Campbell. Taking into consideration that many of today’s fantasy heroes are initially portrayed as anti-heroes, it may be assumed that their journeys necessarily differ from Campbell’s model. Yet, a protagonist being neither brave nor morally superior to others may still set out on a journey in which he has to endure tests. As mentioned above, this journey does not necessarily have to be an overground passage but can also be one into the depths of the character’s mind. As Clute and Grant note, the hero can also experience a joint external and internal quest (769). Campbell even ventures to call the hero’s journey “intrinsically [...] an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being” (245). Hence, the hero’s journey has also been described as “magnified rite of passage, a journey of enlightenment, during which the individual breaks through the boundaries of self to discover his unique contribution to the world” (Stroda 185). Clute and Grant, thus, conclude that the concept of the heroic journey, or quest, are also to be found in most of today’s fantasy literature as anti-heroes and modern heroes alike set out on a journey similar to the one described by Campbell (796).

Since the term hero’s journey is sometimes used as a synonym for quest, it might be useful to compare the two terms. In their *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant describe quests as follows:

Quests are sequential, suspenseful, event- and goal-oriented; they normally reach a conclusion [...]; those who oppose the successful conclusion of a quest – from the Knight of the Doleful Countenance to the Dark Lord – can often be best understood as mere symbols of opposition; and quests require an identifiable protagonist – from Ugly Duckling to Childe to culture hero – plus, usually, an accumulating mass of companions to strengthen and complicate the action. (Clute and Grant 796)

And they add: “Quests are therefore basic to the telling of Story; as fantasy as a genre is inherently tied to Story, it is not surprising that almost all modern fantasy texts are built around, or incorporate, a quest” (Clute and Grant 796). It may be concluded that Clute and Grant position the hero’s quest, similar to Campbell’s notion of the hero’s journey, at the heart of the fantasy story. Although the sequence of the events may vary, both the journey and the quest focus on a number of predetermined events. Clute and Grant as well as Campbell observe that helpers or companions are important to the story as well. Likewise, both the

hero's journey and the hero's quest eventually result in a definite conclusion. Yet, while Campbell stresses the importance of the hero's return from the eventful journey, Clute and Grant's concept only marginally deals with this part of the quest. This difference is emphasized in Campbell's division of the hero's journey into the three stages of separation, initiation and return (Campbell 30), where the last stage determines how the hero's success is perceived. He states that there might be the possibility of refusing the return home, resulting in a delayed or failed completion of the journey (Campbell 30). Clute and Grant, on the other hand, write that the hero of the external quest usually "returns home with the desired object, or partner, or knowledge", while the hero of the internal quest "returns to the world as an integrated person, a Magus, or a Shaman" (796). Thus, they only consider a positive outcome of the quest, while Campbell also gives thought to a negative outcome of the journey.

With regards to this possible negative outcome of the hero's journey, it can be seen that its success is dependent on a specific factor. After the hero has answered the call to adventure, as already described above, he has to endure a number of tests and trials. Here, the factor of fate, chance, or *wyrd* comes into play. In his discussion of early pieces of classical heroic literature, Clark writes that "[i]deas of fate and luck were a prominent part of the heroic worldview" (45). The earlier discussion of Beowulf already indicates that the Germanic concept of heroism is deeply connected to a firm belief in the hero's predestined fate. Similarly, the modern hero's journey is often oriented towards a predetermined goal, or influenced by a certain expectation that the hero has to fulfil. However, Clark adds that "[h]eroic literature frequently implies that fate (or Fate) rules the hero's destiny, but that decisive role is sometimes ascribed to luck, which seems more erratic, capable of leaving the hero, for example, in the lurch on what may seem contingent considerations" (45). Hence, he argues that fate alone is not responsible for the outcome of the hero's journey, but that he is rather characterized by a specific relationship with luck.

This luck is not simply to be called and received by the hero. What is going to happen is already foreseen in fate, but only after the events have happened the essential factor can be called true *wyrd*. Shippey explains the difference between the terms fate and *wyrd* with regards to their etymological origin. He writes that "'fate' [comes] from the Latin *fari*, 'to speak', so 'that which has been spoken', sc. by the gods." On the other hand he states that "[t]he Old English word [i.e. *wyrd*] derives from *weorþan*, 'to become': it means 'what has become, what's over'" (Shippey 145). Since *wyrd* is dependent on fate, Shippey defines it as an "oppressive force [...] for no one can change the past; but it is perhaps not as oppressive as

‘fate’ or even ‘fortune’, which extend into the future” (145). The hero, then, has to accept his fate or try to avert it. Yet, Shippey points out that “people can avert the intentions of Providence, and obeying them (in so far as they can be detected) brings no guarantee of success or safety” (146). He further argues that the hero’s fate may prove to be better than expected. However, this may only be the case if the hero’s actions allow it. Consequently, Shippey writes that “your courage has to hold [...], you have to seize your opportunity with both hands [...], and being ‘too eager to deal out death in judgement’, and more generally knowingly doing wrong to improve your chances, will probably be counter-productive [...]” (147). Likewise, Fisher defines *wyrd* as “the whole ‘virtue’ of the hero - all his developed possibilities - when it is brought to bear on a crisis in his life and the constituted conditions of his environment” (P. Fisher 176). He, too, emphasizes the hero’s willingness to be courageous and to not only trust fate on his journey but to actively contribute to the possibility of good luck. Describing Beowulf’s second battle against Grendel’s mother, Fisher notes how Beowulf trusts his fate too much and, subsequently, almost dies. However, Beowulf’s quest is eventually successful as he receives “aid of providential grace” (P. Fisher 176) by finding the ancient sword, which leads to the defeat of the monster. Although Beowulf’s fate was almost doomed, he did prevail by staying courageous and allowing luck to happen.

Beowulf’s example of *wyrd* can be compared to instances of hero’s luck in other pieces of fantasy literature. Most notably in recent fantasy literature, J.K. Rowling introduced the notion of luck in her sixth book of the *Harry Potter* series. The magic potion called Felix Felicis roughly translates from Latin into “luck of the lucky”. This name clearly alludes to the potion’s positive, if only temporary, effect on the drinker who succeeds in everything they attempt. Having drunk the luck potion, Harry can finally master one of his heroic tests. However, an example for real hero’s luck can be found long before the introduction of the magic potion. Harry only obtains the drinkable luck because he enters a potion brewing contest which he wins with the aid of a book he found earlier in the story. This book comes to him by mere chance, and is a more subtle instance of hero’s luck in the *Harry Potter* series which still exerts a major influence on the following part of his journey.

The following chapter will present another protagonist who is characterized by a special relation to luck, or *wyrd*. Yet, as I will situate his analysis within the different notions of heroism, the findings of the present chapter shall be briefly summarized. After defining heroism as the individual’s overcoming of inner barriers and the following exceptional commitment to a noble purpose that may endanger them, I have discussed four different types

of heroism as well as anti-heroism. Three of these types, namely Greek, Germanic and chivalric heroism, are representatives of classical heroism, which is opposed to the notion of anti-heroism. These two concepts are united in the notion of modern heroism. Fantastic texts employing this modern concept frequently depict heroes as anti-heroes who develop a number of classical heroic traits and are still clearly distinct from fully representing classical heroism. Modern heroism is therefore clearly ambivalent, as it combines the most typical aspects of heroism with the most atypical ones. This ambivalence is often central in modern fantasy stories, as the conflict between their embodied anti-heroism and their heroic potential represents the protagonists' struggle for identity.

3. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

The findings of the previous parts of this thesis will now be discussed in the context of J.R.R. Tolkien's first novel *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* with a special focus on the protagonist, Bilbo Baggins. Written sometime in the years between 1929 and 1936 (Ch. Tolkien, *Hobbit* vii), *The Hobbit* was published in late September in 1937. However, the setting of the book, namely Middle-Earth, had already been described by Tolkien since 1914 in texts which would later be published as *The Silmarillion* and *Book of Lost Tales*. Nevertheless, it was not until one day in the early 1930s when Tolkien was marking School Certificate Papers at Oxford that he found a blank page and without further thought wrote on it: "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." At that point, Tolkien did not have the story of *The Hobbit* in mind yet. However, he found himself inspired by the word *hobbit* and later recalled that "[e]ventually I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like" (Shippey 2). Hence, it was rather the idea of a fantastic being called "hobbit" than a specific plot line that served as an inspiration for *The Hobbit*. Arguably, this train of thought can be found within the plot line of the book, as it starts with the exact sentence, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 3), and only after this fantastic species of hobbits is described in detail the story unfolds.

3.1. *The Hobbit*'s References to Other Pieces of Fantasy Literature

Tolkien's fictional publications have influenced fantasy literature considerably down to the present day (see Thayer; James). Yet, *The Hobbit* itself embraces numerous elements and

literary tropes commonly found in fantasy literature of other literary eras which will be discussed in the following chapter. Most notably, *The Hobbit* tells a story of a fantastic creature of the same name in a fantastic secondary world. This secondary world, namely Middle-Earth, is presented as a land which bears resemblance to England in medieval times. Shippey points out that especially in Tolkien's later work *The Lord of the Rings* references to the cultural and historical inspiration of Middle-Earth can be found, such as the location of the kingdom of Lothlórien "in the Angle between the waters" which alludes to the derivation of "England's" name from the term "Angle" (199). These references may not be as obvious in *The Hobbit*, but the same findings with regards to Middle-Earth's cultural and historical inspirations as depicted in *The Lord of the Rings* can be assumed to apply. Traces of Tolkien's academic interest in Old and Middle English literature as well as his personal liking of Norse mythology can also be found in all his writings set in Middle-Earth (see Chance). An analysis of the traces of fantastic works of earlier literary eras found within *The Hobbit* is therefore crucial to the understanding of the protagonist and the story set within this fantastic world.

The depiction of Middle-Earth plays an important part in *The Hobbit* as it provides the environment in which Bilbo's heroic identity can be developed. The starting point of Bilbo Baggins' quest though is the Shire, the habitat of hobbits, in which the very thought of heroes and heroic deeds is frowned upon. It is depicted as an idyllic paradise-like place in which the hobbits live quiet and peacefully in accordance with nature. The threats of evil have no place in the Shire. Only at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, when the One Ring slowly restores its power, there seem to be obscure disturbances that should not find entrance into the Shire. Huttar explains that the depiction of Shire follows the tradition of the Golden Age mythos in which "the world as we know it represents a woeful decline from a glorious remote past" (Huttar 4). Hence, leaving the Shire can be seen as metaphorically leaving a once perfect past which is described as "long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 5). However, the more Bilbo and his companions venture forward into Middle-Earth, the more dangers they have to endure, the more unreal and remote does the Shire seem, and the more detached from his old self does Bilbo feel.

This feeling of remoteness is, as discussed above, one of the elements commonly found in fantasy literature. It relates to Atteberry's notion of fear as a "a reliable source of suspense, conflict, and reader identification" (1). It may be argued that in *The Hobbit* there are three main types of fear represented, namely the fear of losing home, the fear of the unknown, and the fear of failure. The first fear can be clearly detected in the character of Bilbo who

constantly longs for his home. Not only at the end of his adventure does Bilbo think, “I wish now only to be in my old arm-chair!” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 268). On the contrary, Bilbo repeatedly thinks of his beloved home in Hobbiton from the beginning of the adventure. For instance, right after leaving the Shire, he thinks, “I wish I was at home in my nice hole by the fire, with the kettle just beginning to sing!” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 30). Similar phrases appear in different variations at multiple points in the story (see Tolkien, *Hobbit* 43-44, 57, 63, 65, 105, 143, 161, 192, 197, 203, 247, 263, 272). It expresses Bilbo’s deep fear of never being able to return to the Shire. Especially at the Battle of the Five Armies this fear of never finding his way back home can be identified as a driving force, when he surrenders the Arkenstone in order to bring peace to Middle-Earth. However, it could be claimed that in their attempt to defeat the dragon Smaug the dwarves are driven by the same fear as they try to regain their kingdom and home. Although they already surrendered their home to Smaug, they still consider the Lonely Mountain as their home and regard Smaug’s possession of their treasure as temporary. The second fear is related to the first and is mainly found within Bilbo. As he is dragged along the way, he finds solace in memories of his known and beloved Hobbiton. For instance, when Bilbo finds himself alone in Gollum’s cave, not knowing where he is, he is scared. “After some time he felt for his pipe. It was not broken, and that was something. Then he felt for his pouch, and there was some tobacco in it, and that was something more. Then he felt for matches and he could not find any at all, and that shattered his hopes completely” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 65-66). Although he is in an unfamiliar place without knowing where his companions are, or how to exit the cave, his hopes are only “shattered [...] completely” when he cannot find his matches. It could be argued that here the matches symbolize his home, and the thought of smoking his beloved pipe provides him with a sense of security. As he finds that his pipe cannot be smoked, he suddenly feels hopeless. This shows how Bilbo uses the safety of the known to heroically overcome his fear of the unknown, and only when the first is unavailable he fears the latter.

While Bilbo follows a classical concept of heroism with regards to managing his fear of the unknown, he does not experience a hero’s fear of failure. This is due to the fact that his intention is not to succeed a mission but rather to return home. While it could be argued that failing the mission would probably delay or even thwart a return, Bilbo’s mind is not occupied with fearing a possible failure but rather with a constant longing for his home and the consequent fear of never returning. As Bilbo gladly accepts a possible failure of the mission, he obviously does not strive for heroic fame but for security. This deviation from the classical model of heroism clearly marks Bilbo as an anti-hero. On the other hand, Thorin

obviously represents a very classical hero in this regard. His desire to regain his ancestors' treasure is then clearly motivated by a fear to fail. Thorin feels the burden of representing the noble house of Oakenshield and he cannot fail as a true leader by leaving his ancestors' home to a dragon. He admits that their journey is dangerous, "a journey from which some of us, or perhaps all of us [...] may never return" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 17). Nevertheless, his fear to fail is bigger than his fear to lose his life. As was discussed earlier, failing the mission is a defining characteristic of anti-heroism. Consequently, it may be argued that Thorin's fear to disappoint the expectations on a heroic leader is reflected in his fear to fail. Failing the mission would then mean to fail as a hero. Hence, Bilbo's intentions are revealed to be vastly different than Thorin's, which highlights the different heroic profiles of the characters.

Discussion in earlier chapters revealed that the language used in fantasy literature often alludes to medieval tales. This modern practice can be traced back to the example set by Tolkien's publications. His works are heavily influenced by medieval epics; especially by the Old English poem *Beowulf*, which he discussed critically in 1937 in his paper "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" at the same time as he wrote *The Hobbit* (James 68). As Huttar points out, it would be wrong to assume Tolkien used this and other medieval works and earlier myths as "sources". He rather states that "Tolkien's manner of working was not so much to imitate a model as to ladle his portion out of the great bubbling soup pot of mythopoeic motifs to which storytellers are always helping themselves" (Huttar 3). Accordingly, it might be concluded that the songs and poems which Tolkien includes in numerous passages throughout the *The Hobbit* and other fantasy writings are not meant to imitate the classic epic narratives but to contextualize them in his fantastic world. Lane suggests that these poetic passages are used "to establish cultural identity for various groups and to strengthen its connection to oral traditions of storytelling, a forum appropriate for a legend or myth" (68).

Nevertheless, the use of language in *The Hobbit* is not only distinct in that it alludes to classic epics and myths but it also establishes a link between the time of inspiration and that of Tolkien. For example, the word "warg" is clearly influenced by the Old Norse term *vargr*, meaning "wolf" and "outlaw". Tolkien combines this term with the Old English words *wearh*, meaning "outlaw", and *awyrgan*, meaning "to condemn". He thereby combines both notions as well as their pronunciation (Shippey 30). Similarly, Beorn's name as well as his appearance alludes to Old Norse legends related to *Beowulf* where the hero is both man and bear. While "Beorn" literally means "man" in Old English, it used to mean "bear". He is a

“were-bear” and can change from man to bear. Thus, Beorn’s character combines friendliness and ferocity, joviality and brusqueness, kindness and wildness, all at the same time (Shippey 32). Tolkien therefore incorporates medieval terms and literary models and contextualizes them within his modern fantasy work.

This chapter demonstrated how Tolkien makes use of earlier models of fantasy literature and frequently alludes to the tradition of epic narratives in *The Hobbit*. It will be shown how this connection is used to contextualize Bilbo as a hero within both the classical and the modern tradition. Initially, however, Bilbo is portrayed as neither classical nor modern hero but as anti-hero. This transformation of the protagonist from anti-hero to hero is one of the most central themes in *The Hobbit*, which is also a commonly found trope in modern fantasy literature. Although Bilbo starts his journey very reluctantly, he slowly learns to accept his adventurous side and returns as a new, though not completely changed hobbit. As the following chapters will show, Bilbo’s transformation represents the ambivalence of modern heroism since his character eventually unites seemingly contradictory concepts of different literary eras.

3.2. Bilbo Baggins as Anti-Hero

Bilbo starts his journey as a traditional anti-hero. As noted above, this kind of protagonist is characterized by a noticeable deviation from the classical concept of heroism. Fear, weakness, or the refusal to answer the call of adventure, are frequently used to characterize anti-heroic protagonists in fantasy literature.

Bilbo’s anti-heroic character becomes apparent as soon as his journey starts. He receives an invitation by a messenger, namely the wizard Gandalf, who is “looking for someone to share in an adventure” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 6). However, Bilbo pointedly refuses to answer this typical call to adventure by stating, “[w]e are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can’t think what anybody sees in them” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 6). Here, Bilbo demonstrates a negative attitude towards heroic deeds typical for anti-heroes. As mentioned above, this attitude is described as “refus[ing] heroic commitment” (Clute and Grant 48), or not answering the call to adventure (Stroda 187). Compared to classical heroes such as Beowulf, who immediately leaves upon hearing of Grendel, Bilbo’s hesitation and even fear are clear markers of anti-heroism. Considering Taha’s explanation of anti-heroism as characterized by an “introversion of the main character

[and] individualization” (ch. 4), Bilbo’s focus on his own little world as well as his lack of interest in any disturbances from the outside world can be considered as additional markers of anti-heroism.

By emphasizing the negative impact of adventure on his everyday life, Bilbo resolutely refuses to attach more importance to heroic and adventurous deeds than to his domestic, well-ordered life in the Shire. Comically, this is highlighted by the stark contrast between his indignation at being “late for dinner” and the assumed selflessness of classical heroes who would nobly put others’ well-being first. Bilbo’s attitude can mainly be explained by referring to his genealogy. As is described in the first chapter of *The Hobbit*, the Baggins family was “very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 3). Further, it is noted that Bilbo “looked and behaved as his solid and comfortable father” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 5). Hence, Bilbo is presented as an average, respectable hobbit living a perfect, quiet and predictable hobbit life in which adventures and unexpected events are disliked. Additionally, the name Baggins hints at the fact that coziness and domesticity are most important values to Bilbo. As Shippey points out, Tolkien derived the name from the Old Northern English term *baggins*, meaning “the food a labourer takes with him when he goes off to work, or anything eaten between meals, but especially [...] afternoon tea ‘in a substantial form’” (Shippey 8). The importance of food and dining to the hobbit is, therefore, a distinct feature that characterizes Bilbo and his whole family. Hence, his negative attitude towards anything keeping him from his valued dinner seems plausible. As Chance points out, Bilbo’s attitude towards food in *The Hobbit* symbolizes “not only physical sustenance and continued life but also on a higher level the renewal of spiritual life” (62-63). Therefore, it may be claimed that the character Bilbo is not only interested in the mundane aspect of feasting, but also draws his motivation to continue the journey from it. Incidentally, his mood is often dependent on whether or not he received a full meal. For example, when Gandalf leaves the group at the entrance of Mirkwood Bilbo feels especially unhappy, which could also be due to the fact that breakfast was “a very poor one” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 128). On the other hand, when the companions are warmly welcomed in Lake-town where they are provided delicious feasts, Bilbo enjoys his stay tremendously and is only truly unhappy when they have to leave (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 185).

Bilbo’s discontent of leaving his cozy home can obviously be seen as a reflection of his fears of losing home and of the unknown, which were introduced above as anti-heroic markers. These fears becomes especially apparent when he hears Thorin address him as “our friend and

fellow conspirator, this most excellent and audacious hobbit” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 17). This comes as a shocking revelation to Bilbo who would have never thought of himself as “audacious”. In his own understanding, he is a very average hobbit and therefore represents the complete opposite of “audacity”. Although he would like to object, he is too “flummoxed” to do so. A similar reaction is provoked when Bilbo hears of the possibility of never returning from the journey. He lets out a piercing “shriek” which seems rather alarming to the dwarves. They refuse to believe that Bilbo is apt to partake in the adventure, and one of the dwarves remarks that the shriek “sounded more like fright than excitement!” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 18). Obviously, Bilbo’s anti-heroic fears are materialized in this “shriek” and the dwarves recognize it as such. Compared to classical and particularly Germanic heroes whose ultimate goal is to die fearless and bravely on the battlefield, this reaction seems to be a clear deviation from any heroic ideal. Yet, Gandalf is seemingly indifferent to Bilbo’s apparent unfitness as hero and introduces the hobbit to his new companions as “one of the best – as fierce as a dragon in a pinch!” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 18). Gandalf further replies to the dwarves that he has “chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 19). It could be claimed that Gandalf’s trust in Bilbo’s still hidden heroic skills helps Bilbo overcome his anti-heroic fears and accept the possibility of becoming a hero later. However that may be, this passage clearly foreshadows the hobbit’s transformation from anti-hero to hero which has been already discussed as being typical in fantasy literature.

Bilbo’s development from anti-hero to hero does not occur rapidly. As already mentioned above, he constantly longs for home, and does so until the end of the quest. He also does not overcome his unheroic fear of the unknown until he has no other choice. For instance, when the dwarves and Bilbo are lost in Mirkwood Thorin decides to send Bilbo to talk to the approaching lights as “[t]hey won’t be frightened of him”. However, Bilbo is fearful and thinks, “[w]hat about me of them?” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 141). This thought proves again that although he has already developed some heroic traits, Bilbo remains the scared and rather timid hobbit who actually just wants to find a way back home. Interestingly, even in his bravest moments he is very unheroic since he always attempts to remain unseen. In order to save the dwarves from the spiders and the Wood-elves he uses the magic ring to act under the cover of invisibility (Tolkien, *Hobbit* ch. 8, ch. 9). As a result, the narrator describes him as “the remarkable Mr. Invisible Baggins” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 162) at one point. Arguably, this name alludes to the modern tradition of naming superheroes after their distinct characteristics.

However, as Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* shortly before the successful emergence of the superhero genre, this comment should rather be interpreted as the narrator's positive attitude towards the heroic transformation of Bilbo. The exceptionality of a Baggins being "remarkable" is clearly emphasized, although it might be concluded that Bilbo and his Baggins side have to be "invisible" and literally have to disappear to become a hero. In contrast, classical heroes gain fame by publically acting heroically. While Beowulf strives for fame and glory, Bilbo is not interested in proving his strength and courage. Similarly, he does not always prove to be loyal to his friends as would be expected of a true hero. Both these traits are revealed when he steals the Arkenstone from Thorin's treasure and does not keep it to gain glory, but rather surrenders it to avoid war. Additionally, it might be claimed that Bilbo's real interest is of mundane and monetary nature, as he claims that his interest in the matter lies in "one fourteenth of the share, to be precise" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 247), as promised by Thorin. Subsequently, it can be concluded that Bilbo's motifs are, too, not always fully heroic, and often those of an anti-hero.

In conclusion, Bilbo Baggins' depiction is that of a typical anti-hero. He first refuses to answer the call to adventure, and his fears of losing home as well as facing the unknown are present throughout his whole journey. The chapter revealed that Bilbo's anti-heroic character traits probably derive from his paternal family. As the Baggins family was respected and well-known for the placid and quiet way of leading their hobbit life, Bilbo's longing for his quiet and peaceful home may be a direct result of his genealogy. The Baggins side is therefore not only responsible for Bilbo's constant desire to return home, but also for his wish to complete the mission as to go forward is his only way to return back home. The following chapter will show how the conflict between this paternal side and Bilbo's maternal side reflect the modern concept of heroism.

3.3. Bilbo Baggins as Hero

However anti-heroic Bilbo may be he ultimately develops distinct heroic traits. This concurs with Clute and Grant's observation that many anti-heroes of fantasy literature converse and become heroes along their journey. As cited above, they state that "many important stories turn on the protagonist's recognition of his or her true self, which may well have been cloaked in antihero clothing" (Clute and Grant 48). Nevertheless, considering Bilbo's clear anti-heroic

character, it still remains to be seen whether his developed heroic personality removes the “antihero clothing” for good.

The first sign of change can be observed right at the beginning of his adventure. As the previous chapter has shown, Bilbo’s hesitation to agree to Gandalf’s proposal is mainly rooted in his genealogy and his inherent lazy character. Yet, at times Bilbo actually seems to be excited and longs for an adventure. For instance, when he hears the dwarves’ song about their mission for the first time he “wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick.” Obviously, this contradicts the character of Bilbo as presented in the last chapter and, accordingly, a moment later “[h]e shuddered; and very quickly he was plain Mr. Baggins of Bag-End, Under-Hill, again” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 16). This passage highlights the connection between the Baggins side and the Shire in which no traces of adventure shall be found. “Plain Mr. Baggins” can therefore only be located in “Bag-End, Under-Hill”, while heroes are supposedly found somewhere else. It might therefore be questioned why he eventually decides to partake in the adventure when it so clearly opposes his love for leading a quiet and undisturbed hobbit life. When the dwarves leave without him in the morning after their unexpected visit, Bilbo actually feels relieved; “and yet in a way he could not help feeling just a trifle disappointed. The feeling surprised him” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 27). However, he eventually leaves his hobbit-hole hurriedly to follow the dwarves, and the narrator remarks: “To the end of his days Bilbo could never remember how he found himself outside, without a hat, a walking-stick or any money, or anything that he usually took when he went out; leaving his second breakfast half-finished and quite unwashed-up” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 28). Hence, his departure is depicted as much unlike Bilbo as possible and highlights the unusualness of a hobbit going on an adventure. Bilbo does not only leave the Shire, but also essential markers of his hobbit life. Consequently, it might be claimed that only by leaving parts of his hobbit-ness at home, Bilbo is able to assume a new character.

The source of Bilbo’s motivation to leave his home and participate in the adventure can be found in his ancestral origins once again that signify two sides of his personality. While his father’s Baggins family is the reason for his cozy and cautious character, Bilbo’s other family side is responsible for his desire for adventure. His mother’s, namely Belladonna Took’s, side is opposed to the Baggins family in that they are less homely and, therefore, less respected by other hobbits families. The name Belladonna already hints at the unusualness of the family, as it is “the Latin name of the plant ‘Deadly Nightshade,’ *atropa belladonna*. In controlled

doses, the atropine derivative of this plant may be a narcotic and a medication against pain and spasm. In larger amounts, it is a deadly poison. All this is reminiscent of the ‘adventurous’ side of the Tooks” (Hodge 213). Bilbo’s great-grand-uncle was known as Bullroarer and killed Golfimbul, the king of the goblins (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 18), while one of Bilbo’s other ancestors is said to have married a fairy (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 4). Although the last point was never proven, “there was still something not entirely hobbitlike about [the Took family], and once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 4). Similar to the name Baggins, the origins of the name Took point to the family’s characteristic trait and, eventually, their fate. Once used in Old English, French, German, and Italian, the word *tuck* means “rapier”, referring to a hero’s weapon. Interestingly, the word Bilbo derives from Spanish and also means “sword”. Another meaning of the term *tuck* in Old English was “‘blow,’ or ‘strike’ e.g., ‘he delivered a mighty *touk*’” (Hodge 215). Thus, the name Took already “suggests heroic action” (Hodge 214). Therefore, the Took side in Bilbo does not fear or is appalled by the unknown and possibly dangerous, but is rather intrigued by the thought of it. Hence, Bilbo can feel both the fear and the spell of the unknown, depending on whether his father’s Baggins side or his mother’s Took side prevails. In the case of accepting the call to adventure, he clearly follows in his maternal family’s footsteps. As soon as he hears the dwarves doubting his suitability to accompany them on their mission, he feels offended and wishes to prove his suitability on the journey: “The Took side had won” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 18). Subsequently, he declares almost stubbornly, “I think I am right in believing [...] that you think I am no good. I will show you” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 18-19). It is then the Took side of Bilbo that sends him on his hero’s journey, while the Baggins side wishes to safely return home as soon as possible. It can be concluded that this juxtaposition is responsible for the majority of Bilbo’s inner conflicts as well as his consequent transformation into a hero.

3.3.1. Bilbo Baggins as Classical Hero

As noted in the previous chapter, Bilbo’s transformation into a hero starts with his (at first reluctant and later enthusiastic) answer to the call of adventure. This observation concurs with Jayawickreme and Di Stefano’s earlier cited definition of heroism as the “commitment to a noble purpose, usually aimed at furthering the welfare of others, and involving the willingness to accept the consequences of achieving that purpose” (165). However, since Campbell notes that “[t]he hero [...] is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and

local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms” (19), it can be concluded that not the commitment to heroic deeds but the actual performed actions are what really define the hero. According to the classical representation of heroism, he would need to show bravery, strength, and leadership, as well as wisdom to overcome tests and trials on his quest to gain the title of a classical hero. Additionally, it might be reasonable to assume that the portrayal of Bilbo as a hero is not only influenced by a classical Greek ideal, but especially by the Germanic ideal of heroism. Since the epic poem about the great Germanic hero Beowulf exerted a significant influence on Tolkien’s narrative techniques as well as settings, themes, and characters, the kind of heroism presented therein may have been of similar importance to *The Hobbit*. Considering Bilbo’s journey through Middle-Earth, there are a number of tests in which he has to prove his heroism in a classical sense. These will be discussed in the following.

The first test, turning ordinary and peaceful Bilbo Baggins into a still reluctant but rather adventurous Took, occurs when he encounters the trolls and attempts to steal from them. In this moment, the Baggins side is present again, causing Bilbo to think about home and feeling alarmed. Hence, Bilbo “was very much alarmed, as well as disgusted; he wished himself a hundred miles away, and yet – and yet somehow he could not go straight back to Thorin and Company emptyhanded” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 34). Consequently, “Bilbo plucked up courage and put his little hand in William’s enormous pocket [...] ‘Ha!’ thought he, warming to his new work [...] ‘this is a beginning!’” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 34). This moment is also a beginning in the literal sense as it is the first of the numerous tests Bilbo has to endure. According to Campbell’s concept of the hero’s journey, tests are “unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, [...] which severely threaten [the hero]” (Campbell 245). However, instead of returning to his companions and fleeing the threat, Bilbo overcomes his fear and faces the danger. Subsequently, he first proves his loyalty as he conceals the presence of the dwarves in an attempt to save them from the trolls, and later demonstrates his bravery when he supports Thorin in the fight against the trolls (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 35-38). Although both attempts are ultimately unsuccessful, Bilbo’s heroic side is revealed for the first time.

The next test on Bilbo’s journey, transforming him from anti-heroic hobbit to un-hobbitlike hero, takes place when the companions have to pass through Mirkwood. It needs to be emphasized that Gandalf has left the travelers by that point. This has a tremendous impact on Bilbo’s development. As already mentioned before, Gandalf’s trust is one of the reasons why Bilbo eventually accepts his heroic identity. Since Gandalf has rescued the group up until this

point on more than one occasion by using his magical powers and vast knowledge of Middle-Earth, Bilbo as well as the dwarves have heavily relied on him as their guardian and savior. However, as the wizard bids them farewell he reinforces the idea that Bilbo will become their new rescuer and, consequently, the hero of the story. Eventually Gandalf tells the group, “[w]e may meet again before all is over, and then again of course we may not. That depends on your luck and on your courage and sense; and I am sending Mr. Baggins with you. I have told you before that he has more about him than you guess, and you will find that out before long” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 127). Later, as Bilbo expresses discomfort at the thought of continuing the journey without Gandalf, the wizard reminds Bilbo, “[y]ou have got to look after all these dwarves for me” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 128). Hence, Gandalf advises the dwarves to rely on Bilbo in case of danger, and restates his trust in Bilbo’s still hidden heroic skills. Since Bilbo’s behavior with the trolls only suggested that he possesses a heroic side but no further heroic skills, it could be argued that Gandalf’s departure was necessary for Bilbo to develop them. As the encounter with the spiders shows, Bilbo is soon forced to help and rescue the group from danger where he proves his heroic skills for the first time.

When the time comes to slay his first enemy, Bilbo is completely alone and has no other choice than to kill the spider himself. With the help of his magic ring, he is able to slay the giant spider. This moment is of major importance in the transformation of Bilbo and Gandalf’s remark that “[t]here is a lot more in [Bilbo] than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 19) eventually proves to be true. Bilbo now learns that he indeed possesses the ability to act heroically. “Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 144). While the final transformation from anti-hero to hero is still far away at this point, it can be seen that Bilbo already feels the beginning of a change. Consequently, the narrator calls him “Mr. Baggins” at that point, indicating that Bilbo has now earned the narrator’s respect. It can be observed that the narrator frequently refers to Bilbo by his last name when the hobbit proves that there is “more in him than you guess”. For instance, as Bilbo is killing the spider, the narrator explains, “Mr. Baggins was in a hurry, and before the spider knew what was happening it felt his sting and rolled off the branch dead” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 148). Since it was explained that classical heroes characteristically strive for fame, the narrator’s words indicate that Bilbo has at least partly gained a hero’s high reputation. Another indication that Bilbo slowly develops a classical heroic identity is the naming of his sword after the successful fight. This is a clear reference to

classical heroism, since Hodge explains that the naming of weapons is a common heroic act of Germanic and Celtic heroes. For instance, Beowulf's sword is called Naegling, while the Norse hero Sigurd names his sword Gram (Hodge 218). Bilbo eventually names his sword Sting, which can be seen as "a projection of the spiderlike quality he now possesses after defeating the giant spider" (Chance 67), and is another step towards assuming a heroic identity.

After defeating the giant spider, Bilbo learns that his companions are trapped and continues to prove his heroic character. This scene mirrors the encounter with the trolls in which the group is similarly captured. However, while Gandalf saves them from the trolls, no further help from the wizard can be expected in Mirkwood. Consequently, Bilbo "saw that the moment had come when he must do something" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 146). He decides to lure the spiders away from the trapped dwarves so that his friends can escape. By singing mocking songs, Bilbo succeeds and while the angry spiders chase him the dwarves can flee. Imitating the Goblins' songs, which the group was forced to listen to earlier, Bilbo again demonstrates the courage to face his enemies. However, the narrator remarks that his songs were "[n]ot very good perhaps, but then you must remember that he had to make it up himself, on the spur of a very awkward moment." (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 147). This comment emphasizes that this heroic behavior is still new and strange to Bilbo, and apparently to the narrator as well. "I don't suppose he would have managed it, if a spider had not luckily left a rope hanging down" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 148) can be read later, and hints anew at the narrator's doubt with regards to Bilbo's abilities. Nevertheless, Bilbo proves bravery and warlike qualities in battle. After hiding invisibly first, he reappears when the dwarves are about to surrender and shouts: "Go on! Go on! [...] I will do the stinging!" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 151). This heroic battle cry highlights Bilbo's representation as a classical hero and he fights bravely on the battlefield until his enemies are defeated. "[Bilbo] darted backwards and forwards, slashing at spider-threads, hacking at their legs, and stabbing at their fat bodies if they came too near" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 152). Here, the narrator refrains from commenting on Bilbo's deeds and rather focuses on the fierceness of Bilbo's fight against the spiders. It may be argued that at this point the narrator's containment can be understood as a praise of Bilbo's heroic performance that needs no further explanation. This further indicates that the process of Bilbo's transformation from anti-hero to hero has well progressed at this point of the story.

The next distinct moment of Bilbo's transformation is the encounter with the Wood-Elves. Once again, Bilbo is the only one of the company not being held captive as he uses the magic

ring to stay invisible. Therefore, Bilbo “soon realized that if anything was to be done, it would have to be done by Mr. Baggins, alone and unaided” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 161). Although he could have easily left the dwarves, he proves his loyalty by staying close to his companions to devise a plan. While doing so, Bilbo demonstrates another heroic skill, namely his intelligence. As discussed above, the defining qualities of classical heroism are courage and wisdom, which are both exemplified by Bilbo in this part of the journey. Although he does not demonstrate bravery on the battle field, he still finds himself in a frightening situation in which he has to face danger. Since the Wood-Elves are not willing to act benevolently unless they learn of the dwarves’ mission, they would undoubtedly capture him too if he was to be found. Thus, it requires Bilbo courage to stay near the dwarves. It could therefore be argued that his transformation from anti-hero to hero is complete at this point. However, anti-heroic thoughts are still present in his mind. When he finds himself alone in the Wood-Elves’ lair, Bilbo thinks, “[t]his is the dreariest and dullest part of all this wretched, tiresome, uncomfortable adventure! I wish I was back in my hobbit-hole by my own warm fireside with the lamp shining!” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 161). Yet, he overcomes his unease and eventually rescues the dwarves by hiding them in barrels which are pushed into the Forest River and float to Lake-town at the foot of the Lonely Mountain. Interestingly, Bilbo thereby leads the group to the only possible way to the Lonely Mountain as all the other roads and paths are impassable. This is one of the many instances found within *The Hobbit* that demonstrate the importance of luck for the hero’s success.

As was mentioned above, the notion of luck, or *wyrd*, was deeply rooted in the Old Germanic belief system and was of major importance in tales of Germanic heroes. Both terms are associated with the acceptance that all events are already predetermined and cannot be changed. However, chance or luck may be in the hero’s favor, helping him to succeed. Shippey describes Tolkien’s view on the matter of luck as “there is no knowing how events will turn out, and it is certainly never a good idea for anyone to give up trying, whether out of despair or out of a passive confidence that some external power will intervene” (Shippey 146). Thus, Bilbo is clearly modelled after a Germanic heroic ideal and can rely on his luck. Nevertheless, he also needs to provide occasions for it to happen. This is exemplified in Mirkwood where the dwarves and Bilbo get lost and start to feel desperate as they cannot seem to find a way out. However, they soon realize that the only possibility of finding an exit is to continue their journey. Bombur, who fell into the enchanted river and consequently lost his memory of their journey, personifies despair and an anti-hero’s hopelessness as he refuses to walk further and declares, “I’m just going to lie here and sleep and dream of food, if I can’t

get it any other way. I hope I never wake up again” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 139). This example demonstrates that although it is Bombur’s fate to accompany Thorin to the Lonely Mountain and regain their treasure, luck alone would not have taken him there as he needs to seize the chance himself. In fact, he needs his friends’ support and some of Bilbo’s luck to arrive at his destination safely.

Bilbo is indeed described as “born with a good share of [luck]” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 144), which is arguably a clear reference to the Germanic heroic ideal. One of the first instances of this luck occurs when he accidentally finds the key to the trolls’ cave, which “must have fallen out of [the troll’s] pocket, very luckily, before he was turned to stone” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 41). The group proceeds to find food and weapons, such as Bilbo’s later sword Sting. Another case of luck helps Bilbo obtain the magic ring which he, again, accidentally finds on the floor (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 65). The ring does not only protect him from Gollum and the goblins, but is also the main reason why he is able to save the dwarves from the spiders and the Wood-Elves, can hand over the Arkenstone to the Elvenking and Bard, and can hide at the beginning of the Battle of Five Armies. Hence, it is luck that brings him the ring, and it may be argued that without this ring Bilbo could not have turned into the hero that he is at the end. Consequences of his luck frequently also impact the immediate future. For instance, when the giant spider attempts to attack Bilbo who still feels drowsy, “[i]t was lucky that he had come to his senses in time” to fight it (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 143). Similarly, his luck is the reason why his rescue plan in the Wood-Elves’ stronghold works out. In that passage, Bilbo “saw that luck was with him and he had a chance at once to try his desperate plan” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 164). Later, the dwarves dismiss the plan as too dangerous but Bilbo believes in his luck and manages to rescue them. As already mentioned, he thereby leads them the only accessible way to the Lonely Mountain which can also be ascribed to his luck. One last example of Bilbo’s luck keeps him safe during the Battle of Five Armies. While awaiting the arrival of the eagles, Bilbo is hit by a stone and faints (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 260). Consequently, he misses the dangerous battle and survives without any harm. Waking up, he thinks, “I am not yet one of the fallen heroes” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 261), and indeed he misses the opportunity to prove classical heroic combat skills on this last battle field. However, Bilbo has already proven these abilities by bravely fighting and killing the spiders in Mirkwood. Although his intentions are not those of a true classical hero, as he does not fight to gain fame or to die heroically, he still acts within the tradition of the Germanic hero and rescues the dwarves with the help of luck.

Bilbo uses his sword for the first time in Mirkwood, although he was already faced with the possibility to do so in the encounter with Gollum. When Bilbo needs to escape, he is desperate and contemplates killing Gollum. Bilbo's thoughts seem almost frantic, as represented by the short sentence structures: "He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, puts its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him." (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 81). However, Bilbo's mindset changes as he realizes that the fight would not be fair. "He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 81). This moment marks a shift as Bilbo does not act upon the Germanic ideal of the "spiteful, vain, barbaric, even murderous" hero (Gwara 22). On the contrary, he feels mercy and pity with the vulnerable creature and leaves him unharmed. These feelings are clear markers of a chivalric hero whose actions would reflect Christian values, such as mercy.⁷ Hence, although it is assumed that Bilbo is mainly influenced by the Germanic ideal of heroism, it can be seen that he also possesses traits ascribed to chivalric heroes. It should be noted that Tolkien's perception of the hero Beowulf was that of a Germanic hero who also personified Christian values (Chance 5). Thus, the character of Bilbo as a hero is clearly created with the same ideal in mind, as he represents both Germanic and Christian values. This seems to confirm the theory that not only the narrative of *The Hobbit* but also its hero is modelled after the example given in *Beowulf*.

One of the last steps of Bilbo's transformation into a hero takes place in Smaug's cave. Before entering the dragon's lair, Bilbo hears and feels the physical proximity of the dragon for the first time. He still ventures forward and "[g]oing on from there was the bravest thing he ever did [...] He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 197). Hence, it may be claimed that this scene signifies the moment of recognition in which "the protagonist finally gazes upon the shriveled heart of the thinned world and sees what to do" (Clute and Grant 339). As the moment of recognition introduces the protagonist's awareness of his true self, this scene represents Bilbo's acceptance of his heroic side. Consequently, he embodies the definition of a hero for the first time in full as someone who "[goes] beyond the call of duty in contexts in which terror, fear, or the drive for self-preservation would prevent most people from doing so" (Flescher 109). This moment reveals the full potential of Bilbo's heroism as he continues his way down to the

⁷ Shippey points out that this act of mercy is the reason why Bilbo, in contrast to other owners of the Ring, is hardly harmed by its power, as "he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity" (Shippey 143). Thus, the themes of pity and mercy are of major importance in *The Hobbit's* sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, and have their origin in the scene described above.

dragon's lair despite his instincts telling him to stop. As it were, Bilbo's descent to the heart of the mountain where the dangerous dragon awaits him mirrors the psychological journey into the depths of his mind. On the way down, Bilbo faces the dragon as well as his fears, and does so in the fashion of a true heroic Took.

After facing his fears, Bilbo feels immensely proud when he actually confronts the dragon for the first time. When Smaug asks him who he is, Bilbo decides to hide his true identity and talk in riddles. This scene alludes to the Greek hero's Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus in which he calls himself "Nemo", Latin for "Nobody", to hide his identity from the monster. In *The Hobbit*, the protagonist describes himself as coming "from under the hill" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 204), referring to his hobbit-hole. This proves again that despite his long journey and many heroic tests, Bilbo primarily identifies as a hobbit still. However, he further introduces himself to Smaug as "he that walks unseen [...] the clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly [...] he that buries his friends alive and drowns them and draws them alive again from the water" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 204-205). And finally, Bilbo identifies as "the Ringwinner and Luckwearer" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 205). In a way, this could be seen as the final stage of his transformation. As was discussed above, fantasy literature often resembles a *Bildungsroman* as it is concerned with the protagonist's struggle to find and, consequently, assume a new identity. The story of Bilbo is no exception to that, as its protagonist struggles with his new heroic identity for the majority of the book. However, the scene described clearly shows how Bilbo does not only identify as a hobbit now, but also as a hero and is proud of the experiences he made. Compared to his anti-heroic reaction upon hearing of the possible dangers of the adventure lying ahead of him at the beginning of the story, the emotional growth and acceptance of his Took side becomes apparent. This can also be seen in the sentence structure of his introduction to Smaug. It resembles the archaic language of epic narratives in that it states the hero's personal pronoun which is followed by a reference to his heroic deeds. For instance, in Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* the hero is referred to as "he who had harrowed the hearts of men" and "he who wields power" (808, 1610). However, while heroes of epic narratives are praised by the narrator, it can be observed that Bilbo is not dependent on the narrator's comments here and praises his own achievements. Thus, he proudly creates his own narrative by recounting his accomplished heroic deeds. He thereby establishes himself as a hero of an epic narrative who is proud of his achievements and does not only assume names but also an identity according to his heroic deeds. Nevertheless, Bilbo's developed pride can also be seen as one of his flaws, as Smaug understands enough of

the riddles to infer Bilbo's connection with the men of Lake-town and, subsequently, attempts to destroy Lake-town.

3.3.2. Bilbo Baggins as Modern Hero

In the preceding paragraph, Bilbo's flaw was mentioned which would ultimately lead to the destruction of Lake-town and, in the following, the death of Smaug. Prieto-Pablos recognizes the concept of the flawed hero as characteristic of modern heroes in accordance with the representation of tragic heroes found in earlier literary eras (Prieto-Pablos 66). The tragic hero's flawed action initiates the predestined fall and seals the hero's fate. However, Bilbo is seemingly not doomed by his boast, and rather initiates the defeat of Smaug. It still can be seen as an unfortunate action, resulting in the devastation of Lake-town, but it does not render Bilbo a tragic hero. Nevertheless, he is a good representative of modern heroism as will be illustrated in the next part. His struggle for identity as well as his inherent ambivalent character reflect the modern concept of heroism.

First, although he is described as reasonably affluent, Bilbo Baggins is not of noble or divine descent, which was a defining quality of the hero of classical antiquity. On the contrary, the narrator's emphasis on Bilbo's complete averageness with regards to his genealogy has already been discussed above. Although the distant ancestor's presumable marriage to a fairy (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 4) may establish a faint link to divinity, there are no further references to a special descent of Bilbo in the book. Considering Bilbo's similarities with the Germanic ideal of a hero, it should be noted that there are cases of Germanic heroes who are neither of noble nor divine descent. However, in these cases the heroes are at least portrayed as "extraordinarily gifted" (P. Fisher 172). Bilbo may be braver and more adventurous than other hobbits, but he is neither especially strong, nor particularly more intelligent than other characters in the book. Subsequently, Hodge describes Bilbo as "unprepossessing" (217) and the hobbit is therefore clearly characterized as a modern hero.

Second, Bilbo can be seen as a representative of modern heroism as he shares information and power willingly. As mentioned above, Lotze describes the archtypical modern hero as "unselfish and sharing, someone who makes information available to others, knowing that the information will grow as others use it and be of even more value to the hero" (Lotze 30). These traits can certainly be found within Bilbo as he frequently uses valuable information to help other. For instance, he listens closely when Elrond talks about the Moon-letters on the

dwarves' map and consequently is the only one able to find the keyhole to the Lonely Mountain's secret entrance (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 193). Likewise, he shows his unselfishness and surrenders the Arkenstone to Thorin's enemies as he obviously places a higher value on peace than on money. Though he states that his interest in the matter is of monetary nature, it might easily be argued that the Arkenstone has a higher value than his promised share of the treasure and that he uses the argument only to hide his true intention (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 247). This intention is revealed through his repeated wish to leave the mission and return home without collecting his share first. By contrast, classical heroes are usually concerned with fame and personal gain. For instance, although Beowulf slays the dragons to help his king, he does so with the selfish intention of gaining fame and glory in order to obtain a seat next to the Gods. Similarly, Arthur may fight numerous battles but he does so not to help someone, but to expand his kingdom and be known as a great king. Therefore it may be concluded that although Bilbo is noticeably influenced by a depiction of classical heroism, he is also portrayed as a modern hero with clear anti-heroic traits.

Last, Bilbo's struggle for identity, which was also addressed in the previous paragraph, is a clear indication that he is a modern hero. As previously given examples of modern heroes have shown, the hero's reluctance to answer the call to adventure or commit to the mission is a defining characteristic of modern heroism. This reluctance often results in a struggle for one's real identity, as the hero feels trapped between the difference in self-perception before and after the call to adventure. Bilbo frequently fumes at his own decision to join the adventure. For instance, shortly before entering the dragon's lair, the narrator tells of Bilbo's self-doubting thoughts. "Dear me, what a fool I was and am!" said the least Tookish part of him. 'I have absolutely no use for dragon-guarded treasures, and the whole lot could stay here for ever [sic], if only I could wake up und find this beastly tunnel was my own front-hall at home!'" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 197). This very unheroic thought is being voiced by Bilbo's Baggins side. Hence, Bilbo's struggle for identity is reflected in the inner conflict between his Took side and the Baggins side. Consequently, his anti-heroic traits may also be viewed as an expression of this struggle for identity, as they, too, reflect only one of his sides which stand in clear contrast to his other one. As he finally learns to acknowledge both the Baggins and the Took side, Bilbo mirrors the ambivalence of the modern concept of heroism.

Returning to the Shire, Bilbo finds that "he had lost his reputation [...] He was in fact held by all the hobbits of the neighbourhood to be 'queer'- except by his nephews and nieces on the Took side". However, the narrator, clearly disapproving of Bilbo's reaction, points out, "I am

sorry to say he did not mind. He was quite content” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 275). The narrator’s remark highlights Bilbo’s exceptional transformation from a respected hobbit Baggins who dared “not to be rude” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 8) to a “very happy” hobbit (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 275) who has lost the other hobbits’ respect. However, Bilbo’s utter contentment of identifying with both sides of his personality is reflected by the following passage.

[T]he sound of the kettle on the hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party. His sword he hung over the mantelpiece. His coat of mail was arranged on a stand in the hall (until he lent it to a Museum). His gold and silver was largely spent in presents, both useful and extravagant – which to a certain extent accounts for the affection of his nephews and his nieces. His magic ring he kept a great secret, for he chiefly used it when unpleasant caller came. (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 275)

With regards to Clute’s and Grant’s emphasis on the importance of the successful return of the hero, it can be seen that Bilbo returns from both an external and an internal quest, “with the desired object” and “as an integrated person” (Clute and Grant 796). Although Bilbo has clearly acknowledged his Took side, the passage cited above shows that he does not abandoned his Baggins side in return. He rather accepts the ambivalence of his character and contentedly identifies with both seemingly contradicting sides equally. Accordingly, representative objects of the adventurous Took side, such as the sword and the coat of mail, are now part of his cozy Baggins home and do not invade but rather extend Bilbo’s home. The same could be said about his character, as his acknowledgment of the Took side should not be seen as an invasion, but rather an extension to his hobbit identity. In a similar way, the modern concept of heroism is based on two opposing perceptions, namely a classical and an anti-heroic one. Bilbo’s acceptance of his Took side, representing the brave and adventurous characteristics of classical heroism, as well as his Baggins side, symbolizing anti-heroism and its inherent fearfulness and cowardice, is therefore a clear indication that he is a good representative of modern heroism.

It can therefore be seen that Bilbo’s “antihero clothing” is never fully removed. Although he is shown to be brave and wise like a classical, lucky and fierce like a Germanic, and merciful and loyal like a chivalric hero, he only accepts a very small amount of the treasure and cheerfully returns home to the Shire; and while he “is not the hobbit that [he was]” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 274), he is happy to hear that he is “only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 276). Though an unlikely one, Bilbo Baggins therefore transforms from an anti-hero into a modern hero who embodies characteristics of classical heroism and never

fully abandons his anti-heroic traits. Just like the concept of modern heroism, he is therefore defined as essentially ambivalent.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how the concept of heroism in fantasy literature has changed over centuries, and how the different concepts affect the protagonist's representation in J.R.R. Tolkien's classic fantasy book *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*. As the genre of fantasy literature has existed ever since the earliest pieces of literature were written in ancient times, historical and cultural influences have shaped the themes and concepts presented within the texts of the genre. Accordingly, the concepts of classical heroism as well as anti-heroism influenced modern representations of heroes and can both be found in today's fantasy literature.

Fantasy literature is defined as a literary genre in which elements that deviate from the possible reality of the primary world are incorporated. These fantastic elements usually influence the occurring themes and settings, as well as characters of the texts. Hence, fantasy literature is set in a secondary world, the so-called realm of faërie, in which these fantastic elements are presented as credible and real. Tolkien describes fantasy as the artistic act of realizing imagination which is not opposed to the thought of truth in reality. For him, and many others, fantasy presents a kind of reality that is only perceivable in imagination and can be accessed through fantastic works.

Recent fantasy literature features various elements, such as specific settings, characters, or narrative techniques that allude to the genre's rich history. With regards to the historical evolution of the genre, these fantastic elements gradually changed from a divine to a mundane context. Nowadays, fantasy literature typically explores specific themes of which some are clearly influenced by other genres. For instance, the influence of the "novel of self-development" can be specifically noticed in the way protagonists of fantasy literature often struggle with their identity or transform from anti-heroes to heroes. However, while heroes have always been depicted in fantasy literature, anti-heroes as protagonists are a rather modern invention enriching the genre.

It has been shown that the historical development of the depiction of heroism in fantasy literature mirrors the development of the genre. Similar to the fantastic elements found within

the texts, the earliest heroes are of divine nature while the most recently depicted heroes are usually not special in this regard. On the contrary, modern heroes are often depicted as fairly mediocre until they receive the call to adventure. This call is often met with reluctance which initially marks the modern protagonist as an anti-hero. Other anti-heroic traits similarly contradict the image of the classical hero of ancient times who is characterized as strong, brave, and wise and never hesitates to prove his heroic skills. As the discussions of the different concepts of heroism have illustrated, this was directly influenced by the ancient concept of heroism as a way to connect with the gods through a manly and combat-driven appearance. Nevertheless, both modern heroes, often starting their journey as anti-heroes, and classical heroes, embodying heroic traits from the beginning onwards, set forth on a journey to complete a quest. On this journey, the classical as well as the modern hero has to pass a number of tests and trials to prove his heroism. Essentially, fantasy heroism is then defined as the protagonists' exceptional ability to overcome inner barriers that may otherwise prevent them from accepting a dangerous or challenging task. However, since the illustration of this triumph over their fears depends on the historical and cultural context of the narrative, heroism in fantasy literature is ambivalent and cannot be limited to a distinct set of characteristics.

Both the classical and the modern hero's journey is then as much a physical as a psychological journey, and the previous paragraph mentioned that modern fantasy heroes often start the journey as anti-heroes and struggle to develop a hero's identity. This approach is also presented in *The Hobbit*, as the protagonist does not only have to defeat trolls, goblins, and spiders, but most notably his own fear and the coward Baggins side. Bilbo Baggins is therefore clearly an anti-hero who is scared of the unknown and does not want to continue his journey, which is illustrated by the numerous occasions on which he cowardly voices his wish to return home to his cozy hobbit-hole. As typical in modern fantasy literature, the overground journey, which takes Bilbo from the Shire all across Middle-Earth to the Lonely Mountain and back again, is contrasted with the protagonist's psychological journey into the depth of his mind, which transforms the hobbit from a typical lazy and fearful representative of the Baggins family into a courageous, unselfish hero who learns to embrace his Took side. It can be concluded that since *The Hobbit* is written in the tradition of ancient epics and tales the concept of heroism presented by Tolkien is similarly influenced by ancient representations of heroes and Bilbo is seen as representative of the classical hero. Yet, he also represents a modern concept of heroism, as he is neither of divine nor of noble descent, and is not innately heroic but rather has to overcome his inner fears and barriers.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that, although not every single hero of modern fantasy literature may follow Bilbo's model, the union of classical and anti-heroic traits makes Bilbo Baggins an excellent representative of the ambivalence of modern heroism and shows how crucial an integration of different heroic concepts can be in modern fantasy literature's character development. The three concepts of heroism found within fantasy literature which are presented in this thesis, namely classical heroism, modern heroism, and anti-heroism, are perfectly united within the character of Bilbo Baggins. As he struggles to acknowledge both his Baggins and his Took side, he develops a heroic identity which incorporates characteristics of both families. This struggle for identity and the inner conflict between the Baggins and Took side mirrors the ambivalent concept of heroism which is depicted in modern fantasy literature. The ambivalence of modern heroism is therefore crucial in the development of Bilbo as only the transformation from anti-hero to hero forces him to unite his Took and Baggins side and, thus, leads to his true identity.

The findings of this thesis may serve well as starting points for future literary studies. For instance, it may be interesting to study Bilbo's transformation from anti-hero to classical hero with regards to his surroundings in Middle-Earth. As his journey's stops periodically alternate between peaceful rests and dangerous encounters, it may be argued that the environment plays a major part in his personal development from anti-hero to hero. Another interesting research may be conducted on the different kinds of heroism presented in *The Hobbit*. Since this thesis has solely focused on the protagonist's demonstration of heroism or lack thereof, the other characters were not discussed in detail and may be worth being studied with regards to their heroic profiles. Further, the findings of this thesis may be compared with a similar study on *The Hobbit's* sequel. As the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* directly continues the story of Bilbo Baggins, it may be worth exploring whether the kinds of heroism presented are also similar. Hence, a comparison of the heroic profiles between the protagonists as well as their companions and enemies might provide interesting new insights into Tolkien's perception of fantasy literature and the fantastic worlds presented therein.

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Appendix

Abstract

Das Ziel der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit war es, das Spannungsfeld zwischen moderner Phantastischer Literatur und dem darin verwurzelten Konzept von Heldentum zu beleuchten. Dabei wurde die These aufgestellt, dass sich die Ambivalenz des modernen Heldenbegriffs auf die Entwicklung moderner Heldenfiguren in Phantastischer Literatur auswirkt. Durch den Vergleich klassischer und moderner Heldenkonzepte aus der Phantastischen Literatur, sowie die Erörterung des Begriffs des Antihelden, konnte gezeigt werden, dass der moderne Heldenbegriff sich widersprechende Elemente des klassischen Helden sowie des Antihelden vereint. Diese offenkundige Ambivalenz des modernen Heldenkonzepts hat einen großen Einfluss auf die Charakterdarstellung von Bilbo Baggins in J.R.R. Tolkiens Klassiker *The Hobbit*. Die zwei sich gegenübergestellten Seiten in Bilbos Persönlichkeit verkörpern dabei nicht nur einen Antihelden sowie einen klassischen Helden, sondern auch die Ambivalenz des modernen Heldenbegriffs in der Phantastischen Literatur. Letztendlich repräsentiert Bilbo einen modernen Helden, indem er diese Ambivalenz in seiner Identität anerkennt und beide Persönlichkeitsteile miteinander vereint.